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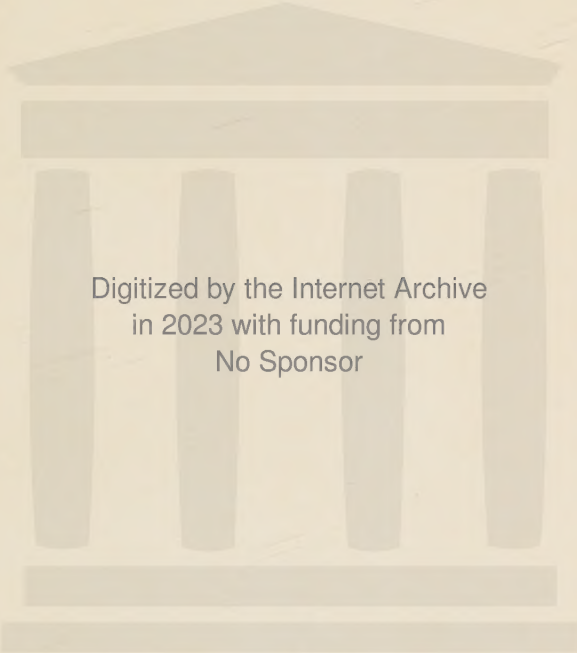
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TOLD IN NORWAY

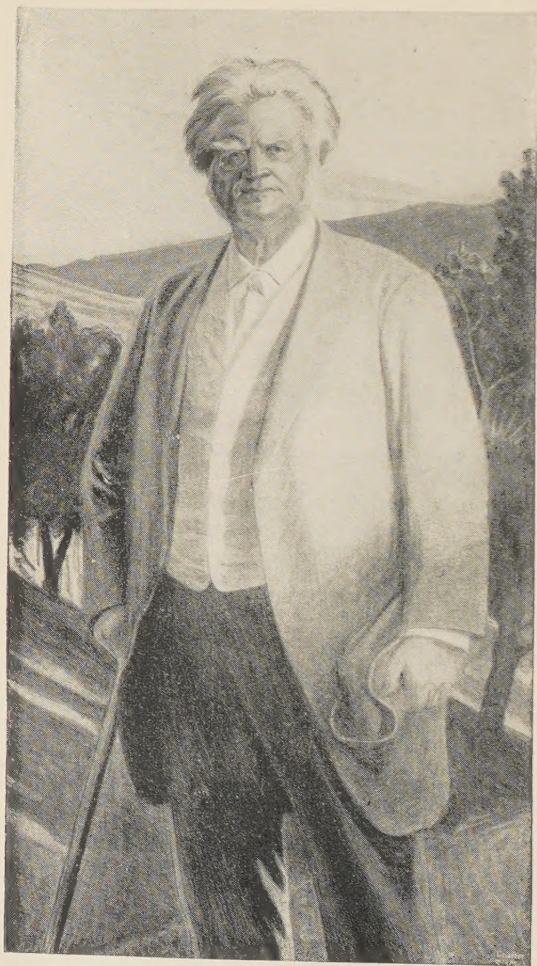
AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN NORWEGIAN FICTION



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BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSSON

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TOLD IN NORWAY

AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN NORWEGIAN FICTION

TRANSLATIONS BY ANDERS ORBECK

A Selection of Short Stories by

BJÖRNSEN • JONAS LIE • KIELLAND
GARBERG • SKRAM • JACOB BULL
HAMSUN • THOMAS KRAG • KINCK
AANRUD • HILDITCH • EGGE
BOJER • SCOTT • DUUN
FALKBERGET • FÖNHUS • UNDSET

EDITED BY HANNA ASTRUP LARSEN



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THE AMERICAN-SCANDINAVIAN FOUNDATION

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JUNIOR COLLEGE

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*The stories marked with a star are taken from THE AMERICAN-SCANDINAVIAN REVIEW and have been translated, "Coffee-Kari" by Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt, "Nocturne" by Barent Ten Eyck, and "The Moose-Hunter" by Jessie Muir. All the others have been done by Mr. Orbeck especially for this volume.

INTRODUCTION

THE NOVEL in Norway is of recent development, but the art of narrative has a long lineage. In the sagas it was carried to perfection. The saga authors knew how to employ crisp dialogue, swiftly moving story, and telling characterization. In the centuries following the stagnation of Old Norse culture, literature lived on among the peasants in the form of the fairy tales which, committed to writing in the early nineteenth century, enriched the Norwegian language with vigorous native words and trenchant epigrams.

When Björnson, in 1857, published his first romance of peasant life, *Synnöve Solbakken*, the style, which seemed so new and fresh, was a conscious resurrection of the saga manner with its terse brevity and low-toned emphasis; but the lyric quality and the warm, optimistic faith were of the young Norway, the new Norway of which Björnson was the living embodiment.

The peasants as subjects for the artist had been discovered not long before by Adolph Tidemand who painted them with their colorful costumes seen against dark timber dwellings, in the simple

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scenes of their everyday life, and in the picturesque pageants of their wedding processions and funeral feasts. Björnson used the same background for his romances, and a later, more realistic generation has accused both him and Tide-mand of presenting only "Sunday peasants." His own contemporaries, on the other hand, blamed him for giving too much prominence to the ugly features of peasant life, violence and bloodshed and sexual lapses. The truth is, of course, that Björnson saw clearly both good and evil, and while he wrote in the romantic manner of the day, he was too truthful an artist to suppress altogether his knowledge of evil. It has been his realism rather than his romanticism that has given the keynote to the novels of peasant life which constitute the greater part of present-day Norwegian fiction.

The creator of the modern Norwegian novel was not Björnson, however, but Jonas Lie, whose first book appeared in 1870. In his intimate pictures of domestic life he used a thoroughly modern method of approach. Eliminating description and reflection, he allowed his characters to live their own lives before our eyes and speak in their own voices. His style, too, was modern and individual, producing its effect by tiny details like the dots of paint on an impressionist painter's canvas.

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Though a realist in method, Jonas Lie all his life shrank from dwelling on the grosser aspects of life, and, sure of his own ground, he resisted steadily the new demand voiced by Brandes that literature to be vital must "take up problems for debate." In Norway the movement started by Brandes took a decided ethical turn. Björnson, while he repudiated Christianity, was more than ever concerned with Christian morals, and thundered his demand for reform along every line. Jonas Lie was incapable of thundering, and would not debate problems, but his vivid presentation of the havoc wrought in individual lives by domestic tyranny and stupid convention was as genuine a contribution to the cause of human liberation.

The moral indignation which the age seemed to possess in superfluity was largely directed against the official and professional class. As this class had held leadership up to that time, it was blamed for almost everything that was rotten in Norway. As the chief spokesman of the revolt, Alexander Kielland directed his attacks particularly against the clergy and the teaching profession, whom he accused of keeping the people hidebound in superstition and ignorance. Meanwhile Arne Garborg and Amalie Skram uncovered the unpleasant facts of sexual vice with a frankness that appalled liberals as well as conservatives.

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The frankness has remained a characteristic of Norwegian literature. The moral indignation and ethical purpose we shall find again in other forms, but the institutionalizing of literature for utilitarian aims was short-lived. In the beginning of the nineties Knute Hamsun brought a new romanticism and a new valuation. The decade preceding him had concerned itself much with dragging out into the limelight the insignificant and the obscure. Hamsun again voiced the right of the superior individual, the man in whom the blood beat high and zest for life was keen. He cared nothing for the virtues that could be measured with the yardstick of good citizenship, but insisted on those imponderable evanescent qualities that could not be labelled or catalogued but nevertheless constituted the essence of personality and determined "what kind of taste a man left in your mouth."

It is true that in his later works Hamsun, too, has essayed the rôle of the preacher, but his message is always the simplest and most elemental, dealing with the relations of men and women to each other and to mother Earth. Isak is the primeval man outside of human institutions, without antecedents or even a name. Nature is friendly and beneficent; trouble comes from the artificial inventions of men.

Hamsun's rambling, discursive style with its

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delightful quality of the spoken word has influenced Norwegian literature in the direction of naturalness and ease. No doubt his insistence on the elemental and primeval—especially in *Growth of the Soil*—has had its influence, too, in leading the writers of fiction to simple and even primitive life for their subjects. In general, however, the tendency of modern novelists is not toward romanticism but toward a realism that seeks to portray life rather than interpret it.

The gifted writers of Norway have in surprising number been recruited from the peasantry. Garborg was of peasant birth; so are Hamsun and Bojer. Others, like Björnson and Jacob Bull, have been sons of country ministers. The increasing use of peasant models in contemporary Norwegian fiction is, therefore, in part due to the simple fact of familiarity; it has been the line of least resistance. In part it is due to the modern interest in racial origins and racial traits. Inasmuch as it was the peasants that conserved the national traditions through the centuries of little contact with the outside world, they offer the richest field to the Norwegian who would search out types of his own race; and they have in no uncertain terms laid claim to being the "real people," the only true Norwegians. This claim was perhaps most brilliantly presented by Arne Garborg.

Without taking sides in the dispute between

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classes, we may note the broad place which stories of peasant life occupy in Norwegian fiction, and we may trace the change that has taken place in the attitude of others to the peasants and in their own attitude toward themselves.

Garborg was a genius who broke through the crust of early repression with the force of a volcanic eruption. There is in him always the note of protest, and though he wrote with equal mastery the *riksmaal* and a *landsmaal* based on his own dialect, he never reconciled the two worlds for which they stood. In Olav Duun, on the other hand, we see peasants who have come into their own. He writes entirely in his own country dialect, demonstrating once more that the dialects are capable of expressing the finest shades of poetic meaning. His poise and self-sufficiency are those of a writer fully in harmony with his subject; and his peasants—proud of family and place—are wholly themselves without any trace of the hybridization that Garborg described and deplored.

In that diligent searching out of racial characteristics which is so marked in modern Norwegian fiction, there is a tendency toward more and more differentiation. Björnson's peasants were general types. The writers of to-day take their subjects each from his own valley or parish. And in that vast elongated stretch of valley after

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valley divided by high mountain or broad plateau which is Norway, the people are as different as their natural environs. The solidity of Aanrud's Gudbrandsdalen is far removed from the fantastic charm and terror of Hamsun's Nordland. Gabriel Scott's idyllic southern skerry-guard is widely different from Jacob Bull's Österdalen with its tall timber and rushing mountain torrents. The people are as diverse as their natural environs. Different from all these are the hard-headed, stiffnecked farmers of Peter Egge's Trøndelagen, or the rough peasant miners of Falkberget's Röros.

Significantly, the novel by which Johan Bojer has completely won the affection of his countrymen is *The Last of the Vikings* in which he pictures with sympathetic fidelity a certain Norwegian milieu. His fame abroad rests rather on his unique and original novels of ideas, in which he takes a certain feeling or characteristic—ambition, avarice, mother love, spiritual hunger, a desire for self-realization in one form or another; it matters not what so long as it is strong enough to crowd out all else—and makes this the dominant factor of the book. The very fact that interest is focussed on the idea rather than on an individual makes for a certain baldness in outline, and explains why his popularity in Norway has

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grown so greatly through his recent novels which have more of the warm hues of life.

In Bojer's novels of ideas the ethical interest is supreme. In Sigrid Undset, too, it is dominant, and in her later works it is clothed in religious form. In her earlier books, realistic novels of modern everyday life, there is evident a groping for a spiritual purpose in life, for something beyond the disillusionments of ordinary earthly experience. In her later works she has found the answer to her own questions. It lies in the individual soul's relation with God. In order to find people in whom religion, simply and naïvely accepted, was the mainspring of life, she has gone back to medieval times, and has thus become the interpreter of this period in Norwegian history.

In their endeavor to know themselves, the Norwegians have turned not only inward to the people closest to the soil, but also backward to their own history. So far as creative literature is concerned, Sigrid Undset is the chief example of this tendency.

The present volume is issued in response to questions from readers who wish to know something about Northern literature beyond the few great names represented in translations from the Scandinavian. While the latter have not been neglected, the book includes a long list of authors

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well known and loved in their own country, but as yet unknown here. By arranging them in chronological order, we have endeavored to show the development of Norwegian fiction since Björnson issued his first peasant story seventy years ago.

In the selection it has seemed best to confine ourselves to complete stories rather than to cull scenes or chapters from longer works, although this has meant the exclusion of a few authors who would naturally find a place in a volume of Norwegian fiction, but who have produced no short stories. Limitations of space have forced us usually to confine ourselves to only one story by each author. This we have especially regretted in the case of authors whose work, like that of Jonas Lie, Arne Garborg, and Sigrid Undset, falls naturally in two or more distinct phases. We hope, however, that the biographical note preceding each author's work may be a useful guide to readers who wish to pursue their study beyond the present volume, which can be only what it claims to be: an *introduction* to Norwegian fiction.

The Committee on Publications already has under way the preparation of similar volumes of short stories from the Danish and the Swedish.

HANNA ASTRUP LARSEN

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

HOW THE MOUNTAIN WAS CLAD

THE BROTHERS

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSSON (1832-1910) has become the symbol of the young Norway's struggle to know itself and be itself. From his youth he took his place as a folk leader, rousing his people to unselfish patriotism. He is the author of the national anthem and of many other songs dear to Norwegians. Björnsson's early peasant stories, *Synnöve Solbakken*, *Arne*, *A Happy Boy* and others, opened a new field for modern fiction. Simultaneously he put forth a series of dramas with subjects taken from Norway's past. Among these the great dramatic trilogy in verse, *Sigurd Slembe*, is the most notable. Beginning with *A Bankruptcy* (1875) Björnsson went over to the modern prose drama written in an easy colloquial style. Following the fashion of the decade, he began to use literature as a vehicle of social discussion. *The Gauntlet* was an attack on the double standard of morality. In his novel *The Kurt Family*, and other works, he continued to preach sexual morality. In his youth Björnsson was an ardent Christian, but later he repudiated the old faith, and in his drama *Beyond Human Power* he tried to show how an overwrought religious faith may be too great a strain on frail humanity.

Naturally, a leader so outspoken and vehement roused much opposition, but when his seventieth birthday was celebrated, in 1902, all factions united to do him honor. The following year he received the Nobel prize for literature.

How the Mountain Was Clad and *The Brothers*, both from his early peasant stories have held their place among the classics of Norwegian literature.

Björnstjerne Björnson

HOW THE MOUNTAIN WAS CLAD

FROM ARNE

THROUGH a deep gorge, wedged in between two mountains, a swollen river ran lumbering down over rock and scree. The mountain walls rose high and steep on either side. Wherefore one side was bare. But at the foot even of this side, and so near the river that it was bathed in its spray autumn and spring, stood a little fresh cluster of trees, gazing upward and outward, but unable to advance one way or another.

"Suppose we clothe the mountain," said the juniper to the foreign oak, its nearest neighbor. The oak glanced down to see who it was that was speaking; then it looked up again, but deigned no answer. The river labored away and whipped itself into a white frenzy, as the north wind swept up the ravine and shrieked in the clefts of the rocks, and the naked mountain sides leaned heavily over and shivered. "Suppose we clothe the mountain," said the juniper to the fir on the other side of it. "If anybody is to do it, I suppose it will have to be we,"

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answered the fir, as it stroked its beard and looked over towards the birch. "What do you think?" But the birch glanced cautiously up the mountain side. So loweringly did the wall lean over that it seemed as if it could scarce even breathe. "In God's name let us clothe it," said the birch, and although they were no more than three all told, they took upon themselves to clothe the mountain. The juniper went first.

When they had gone but a little way they met the heather. The juniper seemed to want to pass it by. "Nay, take the heather along," said the fir. And the heather joined them. Before very long the juniper began to slip. "Take hold of me," suggested the heather. The juniper did so, and whenever the slightest crevice offered, the heather lodged a finger, and wherever the heather had first pried a finger in, the juniper lodged a whole hand. They crawled and crept, the fir laboriously, the birch in the rear. "This is a noble work," said the birch.

But the mountain began to speculate what manner of creatures these might be that came clambering up its side. And after it had pondered the matter for the space of a century or two it sent a little brooklet down to investigate. As it happened, it was at the time of the spring floods, and the brook crept down till it met the heather. "Dear, dear heather," said the brook,

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“won’t you let me pass; I am so tiny.” The heather was very busy, merely raised itself a bit, and labored on. The brooklet slipped in underneath and away. “Dear, dear juniper, won’t you let me pass; I am so very little.” The juniper eyed it severely, but inasmuch as the heather had let it slip by, it might in all conscience do likewise. The brooklet raced on down the hill, and finally it came to where the fir stood puffing, out of breath, on the hillside. “Dear, dear fir, won’t you let me by,” pleaded the brook, “I am so very small,” and kissed the fir on the foot, and smiled ingratiatingly. The fir felt a bit abashed and let it by. But the birch made way even before the brook asked.

“Hi, hi, hi!” said the brook and grew. “Ha, ha, ha!” said the brook and grew larger. “Ho, ho, ho!” said the brook, and uprooted the heather and the juniper and the fir and the birch and flung them pell mell, head or heels, down the precipitous slopes. The mountain sat for several centuries thereafter and smiled at the recollection of that memorable day.

It was obvious enough: The mountain did not want to be clad.

The heather fretted and worried until it grew green again, and then it set forth once more. “Courage!” said the heather.

The juniper half raised itself to get a good

Told In Norway

look at the heather; and so long did it sit half raised that at last it sat upright. It scratched its head, set forth again, and dug in so hard for a foothold that it seemed surely the mountain must feel it. "If you won't have me, then I will have you." The fir stretched its toes a bit to see if they were all right, raised first one foot, which was sound, then the other, which also was sound, and finally both feet at once. It first investigated where it had climbed, next where it had been lying, and finally where it was to go. It thereupon sauntered away, and let on as if it had never fallen. The birch, which had soiled itself wretchedly, rose up and brushed itself off. And away they went, faster than ever, to the sides and straight up, in sunshine and rain. "What can all this mean?" asked the mountain, one fair day, all glittering with dew, as the summer sun bore down, the birds sang, the woodmouse piped, the hare hopped about, and the weasel hid itself and screeched.

The day finally came when the heather could peer over the top with one eye. "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" said the heather, and away it went. "Dear me," said the juniper, "what is it the heather sees," and just managed to reach high enough to peer over. "Oh dear, oh dear!" it exclaimed, and was off. "What is it the juniper's up to to-day?" the fir wondered, and re-

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doubled its stride in the heat of the sun. Before long it rose on its toes and peered over. "Oh dear!" Its branches and needles rose straight up on end in amazement. "What is it all the others see and I don't?" the birch asked, as it carefully lifted its skirts, and tripped after them. It thrust its whole head up over the top at once. "Oh—ho!—If there isn't a huge forest of fir and heather and juniper and birch already on the table-land waiting for us!" exclaimed the birch. The glittering dew rolled off its leaves as it quivered in the sunshine.

"Ah, that's what it means to reach our goal," said the juniper.

THE BROTHERS

FROM A HAPPY BOY

THE schoolmaster's name was Baard, and he had a brother named Anders. They thought a great deal of each other, enlisted together, lived together in town, went through the war together, served in the same company, and both rose to the rank of corporal. When they came home from the war, people said they were two fine stalwart fellows.

Then their father died. He left much personal property, which it was difficult to divide, and therefore they said to each other that they would not let this come between them, but would put the property up at auction, that each might buy what he wanted, and both share the proceeds. And it was so done.

But the father had owned a large gold watch, which had come to be known far and wide, for it was the only gold watch people in those parts had ever seen. When this watch was put up, there were many wealthy men who wanted it, but when both brothers began to bid, all the others desisted. Now Baard expected that Anders would let him have it, and Anders expected the same of Baard. They bid in turn, each trying the other out, and as they bid they

looked hard at each other. When the watch had gone up to twenty dollars, Baard began to feel that this was not kind of his brother, and bid over him until he almost reached thirty. When Anders did not withdraw even then, Baard felt that Anders no longer remembered how good he had often been to him, and that he was furthermore the elder of the two; and the watch went over thirty. Anders still kept on. Baard then raised the price to forty dollars with one bound, and no longer looked at his brother. It grew very still in the auction room; only the bailiff repeated the figures quietly. Anders thought, as he stood there, that if Baard could afford to go to forty dollars, so could he, and if Baard begrudged him the watch, he might as well take it, and bid over him. This to Baard seemed the greatest disgrace that had ever befallen him; he bid fifty dollars in a low voice. There were many people there, and Anders said to himself that he would not let his brother mock him before them all, and again raised the bid. Baard burst out laughing.

"One hundred dollars and my brotherhood into the bargain," he said, as he turned on his heel, and left the room.

A little later, as he stood saddling the horse he had just bought at the auction, a man came out to him.

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"The watch is yours; Anders gave in."

The instant he heard the news, there welled up in him a sense of remorse; he thought of his brother and not of the watch. The saddle was already in place, but he paused, his hand on his horse, uncertain whether to mount. Many people came out, Anders among them, and when he saw his brother, with horse saddled, ready to leave, he little knew what Baard was turning over in his mind.

"Thanks for the watch, Baard!" he shouted over to him, "You shall never see the day when your brother shall tread on your heels!"

"Nor you the day I shall darken your doors again!" Baard answered, his face pale, as he swung himself on his horse.

After that day neither of them ever set foot in the home where they had both lived with their father.

Anders married into a crofter's family, not long afterwards, but he did not invite Baard to the wedding. Nor did Baard go to the church. The first year he was married, Anders lost his only cow. It was found dead one morning on the north side of the house, where it had been tethered, and no one could explain what it had died of. Other misfortunes befell him, and he fared from bad to worse. But the heaviest blow came when his hayloft and all it contained burned

Björnstjerne Björnson

down one night in the dead of winter. No one knew how the fire had started.

"This has been done by some one who wishes me ill," Anders said, and all that night he wept. He became a poor man, and he lost all inclination to work.

The evening after the fire, Baard appeared at his brother's house. Anders lay on his bed, but sprang up as Baard entered.

"What do you want here?" he asked, then stopped short, and stood staring fixedly at his brother.

Baard waited a little before he answered.

"I want to help you, Anders; you're in a bad way."

"I'm faring no worse than you wished me to fare! Go—else I'm not sure I can master myself."

"You're mistaken, Anders; I regret—"

"Go, Baard, or God have mercy on us both!"

Baard drew back a step.

"If you want the watch," he said in a trembling voice, "you can have it."

"Go, Baard!" shrieked his brother, and Baard, unwilling to stay any longer, left.

In the meanwhile Baard had fared thus. As soon as he heard of his brother's misfortunes, he had suffered a change of heart, but pride held him back. He felt urged to go to church, and

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there he vowed many a good resolve, but he lacked strength to carry them out. He frequently went so far that he could see the house, but either some one was just coming out, or there were strangers there, or Anders stood chopping wood outside—there was always something in the way.

But one Sunday, late in the winter, he again went to church, and that Sunday Anders too was there. Baard saw him. He had grown pale and thin, and he wore the same clothes he had worn when the brothers were together, although now they were old and patched. All through the service Anders looked steadily at the minister. To Baard it seemed that he was kind and gentle, and he recalled their childhood days, and what a good boy Anders had been. That day Baard even went to communion, and he made a solemn vow to God that he would make up with his brother, come what might. This resolution swept through his soul as he drank the wine, and when he arose he felt an impulse to go over and take a seat beside him, but there was some one in the way, and Anders did not look up. After the service there was still something in the way; there were too many people about; Anders's wife was with him, and her he did not know. He decided it would be better to seek Anders in his home and have a quiet talk with him.

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When evening came, he set out. He went right up to the door. Then he paused, and as he stood there listening, he heard his name mentioned; it was the wife speaking.

"He went to communion this morning," she was saying. "I am sure he was thinking of you."

"No, it wasn't of me he was thinking," Anders replied. "I know him; he thinks only of himself."

For a long time nothing was said, and Baard sweat, as he stood there, although it was a cold night. The wife inside was busy with a kettle; the fire on the hearth crackled and hissed; a child cried now and then, and Anders rocked it. At length the wife spoke again.

"I believe you are both thinking of each other though you won't admit it."

"Let us talk of something else," Anders answered.

After a little he got up to go out. Baard had to hide in the woodshed; but then Anders, too, came to the shed to get an armful of wood. From where he stood in the corner Baard could see him clearly. He had taken off his threadbare Sunday clothes, and put on his uniform, just like Baard's own. These they had promised each other never to wear, but to pass on as heirlooms to their children. Anders's was now patched and worn out, so that his strong well-built frame seemed bundled in rags, while at the same time

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Baard could hear the gold watch ticking in his own pocket. Anders went over to the brush wood, but instead of bending down immediately to gather up his load, he leaned back against a pile of wood, and looked up at the sky glimmering brightly with stars. Then he sighed heavily and muttered to himself, "Well—well—well—oh Lord, oh Lord!"

As long as he lived, Baard never forgot those words. He wanted to step forward then, but the brother coughed, and it seemed so difficult. No more was needed to hold him back. Anders took his armful of fagots, and as he went out, brushed past Baard so close that the twigs struck him in the face.

For fully ten minutes more he stood rooted to the spot, and it is doubtful how much longer he might have stayed, had not a chill, on top of the emotional stress, seized him, and set him shivering through and through. Then he went out. He frankly confessed to himself that he was too cowardly to enter now; wherefore he conceived another plan. From an ash barrel, which stood in the corner he had just left, he selected some bits of charcoal, found a pitch pine splinter, went up into the hayloft, closed the door, and struck a light. When he had lit the torch he searched about for the peg on which Anders hung his lantern when he came out early in the morning

to thresh. Baard then took his gold watch and hung it on the peg, put out his light, and left. He felt so relieved in his mind that he raced over the snow like a youngster.

The day following he heard that the hayloft had burned down during the night. Presumably sparks had flown from the torch he had used while hanging up the watch.

This so overwhelmed Baard that all that day he kept to himself as though he were ill, brought out his hymn book, and sang until the people in the house thought something was wrong with him. But in the evening he went out. It was bright moonlight. He went over to his brother's place, dug around in the charred ruins of the fire, and found, sure enough, a little lump of melted gold—all that remained of the watch.

It was with this in his hand that he had gone in to his brother, anxious to explain everything, and to sue for peace. But how he fared that evening has already been told.

A little girl had seen him digging in the ashes; some boys, on their way to a dance, had observed him go down toward his brother's the Sunday evening in question; and the people where he lived explained how strangely he had acted on the Monday following. And inasmuch as every one knew that he and his brother were bitter enemies, these details were reported to the au-

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thorities, and an inquiry instituted. No one could prove anything against him, yet suspicion hovered around him. He could now less than ever approach his brother.

Anders had thought of Baard when the hay-loft burned, but had said nothing. When he had seen him enter his house, the following evening, pale and strange, he had forthwith thought: He is smitten with remorse, but for such a terrible outrage against his brother there can be no forgiveness. Since then he heard how people had seen Baard go down towards his home the evening of the fire, and although nothing was brought to light at the inquiry, he felt convinced that his brother was the guilty one.

They met at the hearing, Baard in his good clothes, Anders in his worn out rags. Baard looked at his brother as he entered, and Anders was conscious, in his inmost heart, of an anxious pleading in his eyes. He doesn't want me to say anything, thought Anders; and when he was asked whether he suspected his brother of the deed he answered loudly and decisively, "No!"

Anders took to drinking heavily after that day, and it was not long before he was in a bad way. Even worse, however, fared Baard, although he did not drink; he was so changed that people hardly knew him.

Then late one evening a poor woman entered

Björnstjerne Björnson

the little room Baard rented and asked him to come with her. He recognized her; it was his brother's wife. Baard understood at once what her errand was, turned deathly pale, dressed himself, and followed her without a word. A pale glimmer shone from Anders's window, now flickering, now vanishing, and this light they followed, for there was no path across the snow. When Baard again stood in the doorway, he was met with a strange odor which almost made him ill. They went in. A little child sat eating charcoal over by the hearth, its face all black, but it looked up and laughed and showed its white teeth. It was his brother's child.

Over on the bed, with all sorts of clothes over him, lay Anders, pale, emaciated, his forehead high and smooth, and stared at his brother with hollow eyes. Baard's knees trembled. He sat down at the foot of the bed and burst into uncontrollable weeping. The sick man looked at him intently and said nothing. At length he asked his wife to go out, but Baard motioned for her to remain. And then the two brothers began to talk to each other. They explained everything, from the day they bid for the watch down through the years to this day when they finally met again. Baard ended by taking out the lump of gold, which he always carried about him, and it came to light in the course of their talk that

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never for one single day in all these years had they been really happy.

Anders did not say much, for he had little strength, but Baard watched by the bedside as long as Anders was ill.

"Now I am perfectly well," Anders said one morning, on awakening. "Now, brother, we shall live together always, just as in the old days, and never leave each other."

But that day he died.

The widow and the child Baard took home with him, and they were henceforth well taken care of. But what the brothers had talked of at the bedside came out through the walls and the night, and became generally known to all the people in the valley. Baard grew to be the most highly respected man among them. They all honored him as one who had had a great sorrow and had found peace again, or as one who had returned after a long absence. And Baard grew in strength of mind by reason of all their friendliness. He became a godly man, and wishing to be of some use, as he said, the old corporal turned schoolmaster. What he impressed upon the children, first and last, was love, and himself he practised it till the children came to love him as a playmate and a father.

JONAS LIE

ELIAS AND THE DRAUG

JONAS LIE (1833-1908) began his career as a lawyer, but speculated in timber lands and lost heavily. Not until then did he make literature his profession, and at the age of thirty-seven published his first story, *Second Sight* (translated as *The Visionary*). It was drawn from recollections of his childhood in arctic Norway, and charmed by the freshness of both milieu and treatment. Lie soon found his special field in his sea stories, which, however, were not tales of adventure, but novels about seafaring people in their family life, such as *The Pilot and His Wife*, *Rutland*, and *Go Ahead*. From these he turned to novels of domestic life in the professional and official class to which he himself belonged. Conspicuous among these are *The Family at Gilje*, *The Commodore's Daughters*, and *A Wedded Life*. By his minute but always sympathetic observation and his clever use of detail, he achieved a marvellous vividness, and in fact created a new impressionistic style.

Lie's realistic novels became widely popular, but he himself felt that they expressed only one side of his nature. The mystic strain, which had appeared in his first book, but had been held in check through his whole realistic period, was revealed in a series of fantastic tales which he wrote late in life and collected in two volumes entitled *Trolls*. *Elias and the Draug*, taken from *Second Sight*, combines in an unusual degree the realistic and the mystical elements in his genius.

Jonas Lie

ELIAS AND THE DRAUG

ON KVALHOLMEN down in Helgeland there once lived a poor fisherman, by name Elias, and his wife, Karen, who before her marriage had worked in the parsonage at Alstadhaug.* They lived in a little hut, which they had built, and Elias hired out by the day in the Lofoten fisheries.

Kvalholmen was a lonely island, and there were signs at times that it was haunted. Sometimes when her husband was away from home, the good wife heard all sorts of unearthly noises and cries, which surely boded no good.

Each year there came a child; when they had been married seven years there were six children in the home. But they were both steady and hard working people, and by the time the last arrived, Elias had managed to put aside something and felt that he could afford a sixern, and thereafter do his Lofoten fishing as master in his own boat.

One day, as he was walking with a halibut har-

*"The Parson at Alstadhaug" was Peder Dass, author of *Norlands Trompet*, a long poem descriptive of northern Norway. He died in 1707.

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poon in one hand, thinking about this, he suddenly came upon a huge seal, sunning itself in the lee of a rock near the shore, and apparently quite as much taken by surprise as he was.

Elias meanwhile was not slow. From the rocky ledge, on which he was standing, he plunged the long, heavy harpoon into its back just behind the neck. But then—oh, what a struggle! Instantly the seal reared itself up, stood erect on its tail, tall as the mast of a boat, and glowered at him with a pair of bloodshot eyes, at the same time showing its teeth in a grin so fiendish and venomous that Elias almost lost his wits from fright. Then suddenly it plunged into the sea and vanished in a spray of mingled blood and water.

That was the last Elias saw of it; but that very afternoon the harpoon, broken just below the iron barb, came drifting ashore near the boat landing not far from his house.

Elias had soon forgotten all about it. He bought his sixern that same autumn, and housed it in a little boat shed he had built during the summer.

One night, as he lay thinking about his new sixern, it occurred to him that perhaps, in order to safeguard it properly, he ought to put another shore on either side underneath it. He was so absurdly fond of the boat that he thought it

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only fun to get up and light his lantern and go down to look it over.

As he held up his lantern to see better, he suddenly glimpsed, on a tangle of nets in one corner, a face that resembled exactly the features of the seal. It grimaced for a moment angrily towards him and the light. Its mouth seemed to open wider and wider, and before he was aware of anything further, he saw a bulky man-form vanish out the door of the boat house, not so fast however but that he managed to make out, with the aid of his lantern, a long iron prong projecting from its back.

Elias now began to put two and two together. But even so he was more concerned for the safety of his boat than he was for his own life.

On the morning, early in January, when he set out for the fishing banks, with two men in the boat beside himself, he heard a voice call to him in the darkness from a skerry directly opposite the mouth of the cove. He thought that it laughed derisively.

"Better beware, Elias, when you get your femböring!"*

It was a long time, however, before Elias saw his way clear to get a femböring—not until his eldest son was seventeen years old.

**Femböring*, the famous Nordland fishing-boat whose form has been perfected by centuries of experimenting.

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It was in the fall of the year that Elias embarked with his whole family and went to Ranen to trade in his sixern for a femböring. At home they left only a little Lap girl, but newly confirmed, whom they had taken into their home some years before. There was one femböring in particular which he had his eye on, a little four man boat, which the best shipwright thereabout had finished and tarred that very fall. For this boat he traded in his own sixern, paying the difference in coin.

Elias thereupon began to think of sailing home. He first stopped at the village store and laid in a supply for Christmas for himself and his family, among other things a little keg of brandy. It may be that, pleased as they were with the day's bargaining, both he and his wife had one drop too many before they left, and Bernt, their son, was given a taste too.

Whereupon they set sail for home in the new femböring. Other ballast than himself, his wife and children, and his Christmas supplies he had none. His son Bernt sat at the stem; his wife, with the assistance of the second son, managed the halyard; Elias himself sat at the tiller, while the two younger sons, twelve and fourteen respectively, were to alternate at the bailing.

They had fifty odd miles of sea before them, and they had no sooner reached the open than it

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was apparent that the femböring would be put to the test the very first time it was in use. A storm blew up before long, and soon white-crested waves began dashing themselves into spray. Then Elias saw what kind of a boat he had. It rode the waves like a sea gull, without so much as taking in one single drop, and he was ready to swear that he would not even have to single-reef, as any ordinary femböring would have been compelled to do in such weather.

As the day drew on, he noticed not far away another femböring, completely manned, speeding along, just as he was then, with four reefs in the sail. It seemed to follow the same course, and he thought it strange that he had not noticed it before. It seemed to want to race with him, and when Elias realized this, he could not resist letting out a reef again.

So they raced along at a terrific speed past headlands and islands and skerries. To Elias it seemed that he had never before sailed so gloriously, and the femböring proved to be every whit that had been claimed—the best boat in Ranen.

Meanwhile the sea had risen, and already several huge waves had rolled over them, breaking against the stem up forward, where Bernt sat, and sweeping out to leeward near the stern.

Ever since dusk had settled over the sea, the other boat had kept very close to them, and they

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were now so near each other that they could have thrown a bailing-dipper, one to the other, had they wished. And so they sailed on, side by side, all the evening, in an ever-increasing sea.

That last reef, Elias began to think, ought really to be taken in again, but he was loath to give up the race, and made up his mind to wait as long as possible, until the other boat saw fit to reef in, for it was quite as hard pressed as he. And since they now had to fight both the cold and the wet, the brandy bottle was now and then brought forth and passed around.

The phosphorescent light, which played on the dark sea near his own boat, flashed eerily in the white crests around the stranger, which appeared to be plowing a furrow of light and throwing a fiery foam to either side. In the reflection of this light he could even distinguish the rope ends in the other boat. He could also make out the crew on board in their oilskin caps, but inasmuch as they were on the leeward side of him, they kept their backs turned and were almost hid behind the lofty gunwale, as it rose with the seas.

Of a sudden a gigantic breaker, whose white crest Elias had for some time seen in the darkness, crashed against the prow of the boat, where Bernt sat. For a moment the whole femböring seemed to come to a stop, the timbers creaked and jarred under the strain, and then the boat,

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which for half a second had balanced uncertainly, righted itself and sped forward, while the wave rolled out again to leeward.

All the while this was happening Elias thought he heard fiendish cries issuing from the other boat.

But when it was over, his wife, who sat at the halyard, cried out in a voice that cut him to the very soul, "My God, Elias, that sea took Marthe and Nils!"

These were their two youngest children, the former nine, the latter seven years old, who had been sitting forward close to Bernt.

"Hold fast to the halyard, Karen, or you may loose more!" was all that Elias answered.

It was necessary now to take in the fourth reef, and Elias had no sooner done so than he thought it advisable to reef in the fifth, for the sea was steadily rising. On the other hand, if he hoped to sail his boat clear of the ever mounting waves, he dared not lessen his sail more than was absolutely necessary.

It turned out, however, to be difficult going even with the sail thus diminished. The sea raged furiously, and deluged them with spray after spray. Finally Bernt and Anton, the next oldest, who had helped his mother at the halyard, had to take hold of the yardarm, something one

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resorts to only when a boat is hard pressed even with the last reef in—in this case the fifth.

The rival boat, which in the meantime had disappeared from sight, bobbed up alongside them again with exactly the same amount of sail that he was carrying.

Elias now began rather to dislike the crew over there. The two men who stood holding the yardarm, and whose faces he could glimpse underneath their oilskin caps, appeared to him in the weird reflections from the spray more like specters than human beings. They spoke ne'er a word.

A little to leeward he spied the foaming ridge of another breaker rising before him in the dark, and he prepared himself to meet it. He turned the prow slantwise towards it, and let out as much sail as he dared, to give the boat speed enough to cleave its way through.

The sea struck them with the roar of a torrent. For a moment the boat again careened uncertainly. When it was all over, and the vessel had righted itself once more, his wife no longer sat at the halyard, nor was Anton at the yardarm—they had both been washed asea.

This time, too, he thought he made out the same fiendish voices above the storm, but mingled with them he also heard his wife's agonizing cries as she called him by name. When he realized

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that she had been swept overboard, he muttered to himself, "In Jesus's name!" and said no more.

He felt vaguely that he would have preferred to follow her, but he realized at the same time that it was up to him to save the other three he had on board, Bernt and the two younger sons, the one twelve, the other fourteen, who for a while had been doing the bailing, but whom he had later placed in the stern behind him.

Bernt was now left to manage the yardarm alone, and the two, father and son, had to help each other as best they could. The tiller Elias did not dare let go; he held on to it with a hand of iron, long since numb from the strain.

After a while the companion boat bobbed up again; as before it had been momentarily lost to view. He now saw more clearly than before the bulky form that sat aft, much as he was sitting, and controlled the tiller. Projecting from his neck whenever he turned his back, just below the oilskin cap, Elias could clearly discern some four inches or so of an iron prong, which he had seen before.

At that he was convinced in his innermost soul of two things: One was that it was none other than the Draug* himself who sat steering

*The Draug is a sea monster who sails a half-boat with a crew of men lost at sea who have not received Christian burial. He who sees the Draug, according to Nordland superstition, will soon die.

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his half-boat alongside his and who had lured him on to destruction, and the other was that he was fated no doubt this night to sail the sea for the last time. For he who sees the Draug at sea is a marked man. He said nothing to the others, in order not to discourage them, but he commended his soul in silence to the Lord.

He had found it necessary, during the last hours, to bear away from his course because of the storm, and when furthermore it took to snowing heavily, he realized that he would no doubt have to postpone any attempt to land until dawn.

Meanwhile they sailed on as before.

Now and again the boys aft complained of freezing, but there was nothing to do about that, wet as they were, and furthermore Elias sat preoccupied with his own thoughts.

He had been seized with an insatiable desire to avenge himself. What he would have liked to do, had he not had the lives of his three remaining children to safeguard, was suddenly to veer about in an attempt to ram and sink the cursed boat, which still as if to mock him ran ever alongside him, and whose fiendish purpose he now fully comprehended. If the halibut harpoon had once taken effect, why might not now a knife or a gaff do likewise? He felt he would willing-

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ly give his life to deal one good blow to this monster, who had so unmercifully robbed him of all that was dearest to him on earth, and who still seemed insatiate and demanded more.

About three or four o'clock in the morning they again spied rolling towards them in the darkness the white crest of a wave, so huge that Elias for a moment surely thought they were just off shore somewhere in the neighborhood of breakers. It was not long, however, before he understood that it really was only a colossal wave.

Then he thought he clearly heard some one laugh and cry out in the other boat.

"There goes your femböring, Elias!"

Elias, who foresaw the catastrophe, repeated loudly "In Jesus's name!" commanded his sons to hold fast, and told them if the boat went down to grasp the osier bands in the oarlocks, and not to let go till it had come afloat again. He let the elder of the two boys go forward to Bernt; the younger he kept close to himself, caressing his cheeks furtively once or twice, and assuring himself that the child had a tight hold.

The boat was literally buried beneath the towering comber, and was then pitched up on end, its stem high above the wave, before it finally went under. When it came afloat again, its keel

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now in the air, Elias, Bernt, and the twelve-year-old Martin appeared too, still clinging to the osier bands. But the third of the brothers had disappeared.

It was a matter of life and death now, first of all, to get the rigging cut away on one side, that they might be rid of the mast, which would otherwise rock the boat from beneath, and then to crawl up onto the hull and let the imprisoned air out, which would otherwise have kept the boat too high afloat and prevented it riding the waves safely. After considerable difficulty they succeeded in so doing, and Elias, who had been the first to clamber up, assisted the other two to safety.

Thus they sat the long winter night through, desperately clinging with cramped hands and numb knees to the hull, as one wave after another swept over them.

After a few hours, Martin, whom the father had supported all this time as best he could, died of exhaustion and slipped into the sea.

They had several times attempted to call for help, but realizing that it was of no avail, they finally gave it up.

As the two, thus left alone, sat on the hull of the boat, Elias told Bernt he knew that he himself was fated soon to "follow mother," but

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he had a firm hope that Bernt would be saved in the end, if only he stuck it out like a man. And then he told him all about the Draug—how he had wounded him in the neck with the halibut harpoon, and how the Draug was now taking his revenge and would surely not give in until they were quits.

It was towards nine o'clock in the morning before the day finally began to dawn. Elias then handed over to Bernt, who sat at his side, his silver watch with the brass chain, which he had broken in pulling it out from underneath his close-buttoned vests.

He still sat on a while longer, but as it grew lighter, Bernt saw that his father's face was ghastly pale. The hair on his head had parted in several places, as it often does just before death, and the skin on his hands was worn off from his efforts to hang on to the keel. Bernt realized that his father was near the end. He tried, as well as the pitching of the boat permitted, to edge over to him and support him. But when Elias noticed it, he waved him back.

"You stay where you are, Bernt, and hold fast! I'm going to mother! In Jesus's name!"

And so saying he threw himself backward down from the hull.

When the sea had got its own, it quieted down

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for a while, as every one knows who has straddled a hull. It became easier for Bernt to maintain his hold, and with the coming of daylight new hope kindled in him. The storm moderated, and in the full light of day he thought he recognized his surroundings—that he was, in fact, drifting directly off shore from his own home, Kvalholmen.

He began crying for help again, but he really had greater faith in a tide he knew bore landward, just beyond a projection of the island, which checked the fury of the sea.

He drifted nearer and nearer shore, and finally came so close to one of the skerries that the mast, which still floated alongside the boat, grated on the rocks with the rising and falling of the surf. Stiff as his muscles and joints were from his sitting so long and holding fast to the hull, he managed with a great effort to transfer himself to the skerry, after which he hauled in the mast and finally moored the femböring.

The little Lap girl, who was home alone, for two whole hours thought she heard cries for help, and when they persisted she mounted the hilltop to look out to sea. There she saw Bernt on the skerry, and the upturned femböring beating up and down against it. She ran instantly down to the boat house, pushed out the old rowboat, and

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rowed it out to the skerry, hugging the shore round the island.

Bernt lay ill, under her care, the whole winter long, and did not take part in the fishing that year. People used to say that ever after he seemed now and again a little queer. To sea he would never go again; he had come to fear it.

He married the Lap girl, and moved up to Malingen, where he broke new ground and cleared himself a home. There he is still living and doing well.

ALEXANDER KIELLAND

SIESTA

THE SPIRIT OF THE BALL

ALEXANDER LANGE KIELLAND (1849-1906) belonged to a family which for a hundred years or more had held a leading position in the business and social life of Stavanger. Following the traditions of his family, he entered on a business career, but abandoned it to devote himself to writing. Kielland was a cosmopolitan in his outlook, but remained always deeply attached to his native town. In his novels *Garman and Worse* and *Skipper Worse* he has drawn delightfully intimate pictures of the old town with its few patrician families and its pushing lower orders, skippers, fishermen and tradesmen. Though himself one of the most fortunate of human beings, Kielland generously allied himself with the forces of revolt, and devoted his pen to the causes that appealed to his sense of justice. *Working Folk*, *Else*, *Poison*, *Fortuna*, *Snow* and *Midsummer Festival* were directed against various social abuses or worn out traditions, against the exploitation of the poor, or the inanities of education, the tyranny of bureaucracy, or the kill-joy influence of the clergy. While the tendency is sometimes too evident for artistic perfection, the fluent narrative, polished style, and apt characterization make his books very pleasant reading. Kielland was an admirer of Georg Brandes, an intimate friend of Edward Brandes and J. P. Jacobsen, and very much under the influence of the ideas that emanated from their circle in Denmark. The two stories included in this volume are examples of his social theories.

Alexander Kielland

SIESTA

IN ONE of the elegant bachelor apartments in Rue Castiglione a merry company sat eating their dessert.

Signor José Francisco de Silvis was a short-legged, coal-black Portugese, one of those who come from Brazil with incredible wealth, live an incredible life in Paris, and above all things specialize in most incredible acquaintances. In this little party there was scarcely one, aside from those who had come in couples, who as much as knew his own dinner partner. The host himself they had met at some ball, or at some table d'hote, or merely on the street.

Signor de Silvis laughed and talked loudly wherever he went, as foreigners are wont to do; and inasmuch as he was unable to attain the level of the Jockey Club, he gathered together such as he could find; he immediately inquired the address of any one he met and the very next day sent an invitation to a little dinner.

He spoke all languages—even German; and one could see he was not a little proud when he

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called out across the table, "*Mein lieber Hr. Doktor!—wie geht's Ihnen?*"

There was in fact a real German doctor among them—with a light red overgrown beard, and with that smile from Sedan which the Germans wear in Paris.

The temperature of the conversation rose with the champagne: elegant French and broken French mingled with Spanish and Portugese. The ladies leaned back in their chairs and laughed; they already knew each other well enough not to be embarrassed. Bon mots and witticisms flew across the table and from mouth to mouth. Only *der liebe Doktor* held forth earnestly with his partner—a French journalist with a red ribbon in his buttonhole.

There was one other who was not carried away by the merriment. He sat at the right of Mademoiselle Adèle; at her left sat her new lover, the stocky Anatole, who had overeaten on truffles.

During the dinner Mademoiselle Adèle had tried by means of various little innocent artifices to enliven her companion on the right, but he remained quiet, answered her queries civilly, but briefly and in a low voice.

At first she thought he was a Polak—one of those tiresome representatives of the race who go about parading their banishment. But she soon

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saw that she was wrong, and that nettled Mademoiselle Adèle, for it was one of her specialties to be able immediately to classify all the foreigners she met,—she used to insist she could guess a person's nationality as soon as she had exchanged ten words with him.

The uncommunicative stranger puzzled her not a little. If only he had been blond, she would straightway have made him out an Englishman, for he talked like one. But no—he had black hair, a heavy dark mustache, and a trim little figure. His fingers were strikingly long, and he had a characteristic way of picking at the bread and playing with his dessert fork.

"He is a musician," Mademoiselle Adèle whispered to her stout companion.

"Ah!" Monsieur Anatole replied, "I'm afraid I have eaten too many truffles."

Mademoiselle Adèle whispered something by way of advice into his ear, whereupon he laughed and looked very lovesick.

In the meantime she could not give up the interesting stranger. After she had enticed him into drinking several glasses of champagne he became livelier and more talkative.

"Ah!" she exclaimed suddenly, "I can tell by your speech: you're an Englishman after all!"

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The stranger reddened, and he answered quickly, "No, Madame!"

Mademoiselle Adèle laughed. "I beg your pardon! I should have known Americans resent being taken for Englishmen!"

"I am not an American either," the stranger protested.

This was too much for Mademoiselle Adèle; she bent over her dessert and looked sullen; for she noticed Mademoiselle Louison, across the table from her, gloating over her discomfiture.

The stranger observed it too, and added in a low voice, "I am an Irishman, Madame."

"Ah!" Mademoiselle Adèle responded with a smile of gratitude; for she was easy to appease.

"Anatole! Irishman—what is that?" she whispered.

"They are the poor in England," he whispered in reply.

"Oh!" Mademoiselle Adèle raised her eyebrows and cast a shy glance at her companion on the right; he had suddenly lost much of his interest for her.

De Silvis's dinners were excellent. The guests had sat at the table a long time; to Monsieur Anatole the oysters, with which they had begun, seemed like some beautiful far away dream, but of the truffles he suffered constant reminders.

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The actual eating was over; now and then a hand reached out for a glass, or some one fingered the fruit, or the small cakes.

The sentimental blond Mademoiselle Louison lapsed into a reverie over a grape she dropped into her champagne glass. Tiny sparkling bubbles of air attached themselves to the skin; and when the white glittering pearls had completely surrounded the heavy grape they raised it up through the wine to the surface.

"Behold!" Mademoiselle Louison exclaimed, as she turned her dreamy eyes towards the journalist. "Behold! how white robed angels carry sinners to heaven!"

"Ah, *charmant*, Mademoiselle!" the journalist exclaimed in ecstasy. "What a sublime thought!"

Mademoiselle Louison's sublime thought went the rounds of the table and elicited general felicitations. Only the frivolous Adèle whispered to her corpulent lover, "I'm afraid it would take no end of angels to raise you to heaven, Anatole!"

But meanwhile the journalist seized the opportunity, and he knew how to command general attention. He was thankful, too, to escape a tiresome political discussion with the German doctor, and inasmuch as he wore a red ribbon in his buttonhole and had the superior newspaper manner, all listened to him.

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He expatiated on how insignificant forces, slight in themselves, could when united lift extraordinary burdens; and thence he bridged over to the topic of the hour; the magnificent subscriptions sponsored by the press in behalf of the distressed in Spain and the poor in Paris. He had much to say, and all the time referred to the press as "we," as he waxed eloquent about "these many millions which we—with great sacrifices—have collected."

The others, too, had each something to contribute to the discussion of the subject. Countless little generous acts, from those days of pleasure, were divulged, acts that smacked of sacrifice.

Mademoiselle Louison's most intimate friend—a nondescript lady who sat at the lower end of the table—told, over Louison's modest protest, how Mademoiselle had taken home three poor seamstresses one day—into her own apartment, and had let them sew all night before the festival in the Hippodrome, and had served the poor girls both food and coffee—besides paying them.

At once Mademoiselle Louison became an important personage at the table, and the journalist began to show her especial attention.

These noble examples of charity and Louison's dreamy eyes put the whole company in a quiet, self-satisfied, sympathetic frame of mind, exactly

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attuned to the lassitude which had followed the strenuous dinner.

This sense of well-being increased rather than diminished when they had settled back in the soft cushioned chairs in the cool salon.

There was no light other than that from the fire on the hearth. The red reflection flickered over the English rug, followed the gold fillet of the tapestry, and lit up the gilt frame of a picture, the piano which stood directly in front, and here and there a face back in the dark. Otherwise nothing could be seen except the glow of cigar and cigarette ends.

The conversation died down—a whisper here and there, with the clink of a coffee cup as it was put away. Every one seemed content to enjoy undisturbed the quiet pleasure of digestion and the friendly, sympathetic mood. Even Monsieur Anatole forgot his truffles, as he stretched himself out in a low chair near the sofa, where Mademoiselle Adèle had made herself comfortable.

“Is there no one here will play for us?” Signor de Silvis asked from where he sat. “You, Mademoiselle Adèle, are always so generous.”

“Ah—no—no!” Mademoiselle Adèle exclaimed, “I have eaten too much dinner.” And she leaned back on the sofa, pulled up her feet, and folded her hands over her little round silken stomach.

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The stranger—the Irishman—rose from his corner and went over to the piano.

“Ah—you will play for us? It is good of you—Monsieur—hm—! Signor de Silvis had forgotten his name—something which frequently happened to him with his guests.

“See! He is a musician!” Mademoiselle Adèle said to her companion. Anatole grunted in admiration.

That indeed was the impression he gave all, merely by the way he sat down and without any preliminaries struck a few chords here and there—to awaken the instrument, as it were.

Thereupon he began to play—sportively, lightly, frivolously, as the mood dictated. The latest melodies, light and sentimental, he dashed off between snatches of waltzes and ballads; all those insignificant bits which Paris hums for a space of a week he wove together into a brilliant and easy fantasy.

The ladies applauded in admiration, hummed a few measures, and tapped with their feet. The whole company followed him intently; he had struck their mood and had swept them all with him from the very start. Only *der liebe Doktor* listened with his Sedan smile; these were trifling things to him.

But before long there was something even for

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the German; he nodded now and then a kind of approval.

A strain of Chopin appeared and wove itself into the harmony of the mood—the piquant fragrance that filled the air, the gay ladies, these people, so frank and untroubled, all strangers to each other, hidden in the elegant half-dark salon, each one pursuing his inmost thoughts, swept on by the mystic half-articulate music,—while the reflection from the fire rose and fell, and everything that was gilded shone forth through the darkness.

And ever there came more and more for the doctor. From time to time he turned to de Silvis and signaled, as when he recognized *anklänge* of *unser Schumann*, *unser Beethoven*, or even *unser famoser Richard*.

In the meantime the stranger played on, evenly and without effort, a little bent over to the left to give more power to his bass. He played as if he had twenty fingers—all of steel. He somehow knew how to assemble the multitude of tones and weave them together into a single mass of harmony. Without pausing, without indicating transitions, he held them with ever new surprises, suggestions, and ingenious combinations. Even the least musical submitted to the spell.

But imperceptibly the music changed its color. The artist worked his way constantly down the

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instrument, leaning more and more to the left, and in the bass there gradually appeared a discordant element of unrest. The anabaptists from *The Prophet* came with heavy, ponderous tread; a rider from *Damnation de Faust* came rushing from below in the despairing and limping gallop of hell.

The rumble of the bass grew louder and louder, and Monsieur Anatole began to feel his truffles again. Mademoiselle Adèle sat half upright; the music would not let her lie in peace. Here and there the fire lit up a pair of black eyes that stared at the artist. He had lured them on, and they could not now let go. Ever downward he led them—down—down. The rumble and mumble of the bass sounded to them like muffled moans and threats.

"*Er führt 'ne famose linke Hand,*" the doctor commented.

But de Silvis did not heed him; he sat like the rest in breathless suspense.

A dark and oppressive terror began to emanate from the music and settle down over them. With his left hand the artist seemed to tie a Gordian knot, which never could be untied, while with his right he executed light runs, flame-like, up and down the keyboard. It sounded as if some sinister thing were brewing in the cellar while above the people caroused and made merry.

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There was a sigh—a half cry—from one of the ladies, who felt indisposed; but no one took any notice of it. The artist now worked both hands together in the bass; his tireless hands eerily wove the tones together and sent the cold chills down their backs.

But in the deep defiant rumble of the bass there had begun a movement up the scale. The tones ran into each other—over—past each other—up—ever up—without getting anywhere. There was a wild struggle to get out—a riot—of little black forms that wrestled and labored with maddening frenzy and feverish haste, scrambling, hanging on by tooth and nail, kicking each other, swearing, crying, begging;—and all the while his hands progressed upward so slowly, so painfully slowly.

“Anatole!” Mademoiselle Adèle whispered, ghastly pale, “he is playing poverty!”

“Oh—my truffles!” Anatole moaned and nursed his stomach.

Suddenly the salon lit up. Two servants with lamps and candelabra appeared in the curtained doorway; and in the same instant the stranger artist ceased, as his fingers of steel hammered out one last mighty discord of sound—so impossible—so awful—that the whole company started. “Away with the lamps!” de Silvis cried. “No—no!” Mademoiselle Adèle importuned. “I am

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afraid of the dark! Ugh—what a horrid person!”

Who was he? Aye—who was he? Instinctively they crowded around the host, and no one remarked that the stranger had slipped out behind the servants.

De Silvis tried to laugh. “I believe it was the devil himself. Come—let’s all go to the opera!”

“The opera!—I should say not!” Louison exclaimed. “I don’t want to hear music again for a fortnight,—and then those mobs in the opera stairway!”

“Ah, my truffles!” Anatole moaned.

The company broke up. Somehow they had all come to feel suddenly that they were strangers in a strange place, and they wanted each one to slip away home and be alone.

As the journalist escorted Mademoiselle Louison to her carriage, he said, “That’s what we get for letting ourselves be enticed to these semi-barbarians; one can never be sure of the company one meets.”

“Alas!—he has completely spoiled my beautiful mood!” Louison mourned sadly, as she turned her dreamy eyes towards him. “Would you see me to la Trinité? Unless I’m mistaken, there is a low mass sung there at twelve.”

The journalist bowed and entered the carriage with her.

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But as Mademoiselle Adèle and Monsieur Anatole rode past the English apothecary in Rue de la Paix, he stopped the coachman, and said to her apologetically, "I believe I had better get out and get something for my truffles. You won't take it ill, will you? The music—you see——"

"That's all right, my friend! Frankly, I think we are neither of us in the mood to-night. Good night—I'll see you to-morrow perhaps!"

She leaned back in the carriage—relieved to be alone; and all the way home the frivolous creature wept as if she had been whipped.

Anatole was, of course, concerned about his truffles; yet he had to admit to himself that he grew better as the carriage rolled away. Since they had first met they had never been so satisfied with each other as they were at this moment—when they parted.

He who stood it best was *der liebe Doktor*; for as a German he was hardened to music. Nevertheless he decided to walk all the way to Brassier Müller in Rue Richelieu and get himself a tankard of real German beer and perhaps a bit of ham—to top it all off with.

THE SPIRIT OF THE BALL

UP THE glittering marble stairs she had mounted, without effort, borne on only by her great beauty and her good nature. She had taken her place in the halls of the mighty and the rich without having paid for her entré with her honor and her good name. And yet there was no one could say whence she had come, although it was whispered about it was from the lowest levels.

As a foundling in one of the outskirts of Paris she had starved away her childhood in a life amid vice and poverty, which only they can conceive who have known it from experience. The rest of us, who have our knowledge from books and reports, have to call upon our imagination to picture the inherited misery in a large city; yet perhaps even so, the most horrible of the pictures we thus paint are pale in comparison with the reality.

It had been, in fact, only a matter of time when vice should seize her—as a cogwheel seizes one who approaches too near the machine—only to cast her, with the inexorable exactitude of a machine, having first whirled her about for a short time in a life of shame and degradation, into some corner or other, where unknown and

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unknowable she would end this travesty on a human life.

Then it was that she was "discovered," as now and then happens, by a rich and eminent man, when one day, just turned fourteen, she ran across one of the better streets. She was on her way to a dark rear room in Rue des Quatre Vents, where she worked for a madam whose specialty was ball-flowers.

It was not alone her extraordinary beauty which attracted his attention, but her whole carriage, her air, and the expression in her half-formed features. All seemed to suggest to him that here a battle was waged between an innately noble character and an incipient brazenness; and inasmuch as he sported the incalculable whims of excessive wealth, he decided to make an effort to save her from misfortune.

It had not been difficult to secure possession of her, for she belonged to no one. She had received a name and had been entered in one of the best convent schools; and her benefactor had had the satisfaction of seeing the evil shoots die away and disappear. She developed a lovable, somewhat indolent disposition, a flawless, quiet demeanor, and an extraordinary beauty.

When, therefore, she grew up he had married her. Their married life had proved very harmonious and peaceful. In spite of their great

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difference in age, he had an unbounded confidence in her, and she fully deserved it.

Married people in France do not live so close to each other as they do with us; their demands on one another are therefore not so exacting and their disappointments not so bitter.

She was not happy, but content. It was ingrained in her nature to be thankful for all that had been *done* for her. Wealth did not tire her; on the contrary, it frequently gave her a kind of childish joy. But *that* no one suspected; for always she bore herself with assurance and dignity. People surmised merely that all was not well with respect to her origins; but when no one answered, they ceased to ask: people have so many other things to think about in Paris.

Her past she had forgotten. She had forgotten it in the same way as we forget the roses, the silk ribbons, and the faded letters of our youth,—because we never think of them. They lie under lock and key in a drawer which we never open. And yet—if by chance we should steal a fleeting glance into the secret drawer we should know immediately whether a single one of those roses or the tiniest ribbon were missing. For we remember them to the very last trifle: the memories lie there just as fresh as ever—just as sweet and just as bitter.

In this sense she had forgotten her past: she

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had locked it in the drawer and thrown away the key.

Yet occasionally at night she still dreamed frightful dreams. She felt once more how the old woman she had lived with shook her by the shoulders and sent her off in the cold morning to madam of the ball-flowers. She would start up in her bed and stare out into the darkness in mortal terror. But soon she felt the silk coverlet again and the soft pillows; her fingers followed the rich decorations on her magnificent bed; and while sleepy little angels slowly drew the heavy dream curtain aside, she enjoyed to the full that strange unspeakable sense of relief which we feel when we discover that a bad and hideous dream was only a dream.

* * *

Leaning back on the velvet cushions, she drove to the great ball at the Russian ambassador's. The nearer she approached her goal, the more slowly she progressed, until her carriage joined the long cue, which crept forward step by step.

In the spacious square in front of the hotel, which was richly illuminated with torches and gas lamps, a great multitude had assembled. Not only strollers, who had stopped in passing, but workers, idlers, poor women, and ladies of doubtful reputation—in fact, principally these. All

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stood tightly packed together on either side of the row of vehicles. Facetious remarks and coarse witticisms in the most vulgar Parisian lingo assaulted the ears of the wealthy on all sides.

She heard words uttered she had not heard in many long years, and she blushed to think that she was the only one perhaps in all that long line of carriages who understood this ribaldry from the dregs of Paris.

She began to look about at the faces round her; it seemed to her that she knew them all. She knew instinctively what they were thinking, what was going on within their tightly packed heads; and little by little a host of reminiscences rushed in upon her. She defended herself as best she could against them; but she was not her usual self this evening.

After all, she had not lost the key to her secret chamber! Under protest she drew it forth, and the memories overwhelmed her.

She remembered how often she herself—but half a child—had with greedy eyes devoured the fine ladies who drove smartly dressed to balls or to theaters; how often she had wept in bitter envy over the flowers she laboriously fashioned for others to deck themselves with. Here before her she saw the same greedy eyes—the same insatiable hateful envy.

And the somber earnest men, who half scorn-

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fully, half menacingly eyed the equipages—she knew them all. Had she not, herself a mere child, huddled in some corner, listened with eager ears to their ravings about the injustice of life, about the tyranny of the rich, about the rights of the workers, which they needed only stretch forth their hands to take?

She knew that they hated everything—from the well-fed horses and the pompous coachmen to the bright glittering carriages; but above everything else those who sat within—these insatiate vampires, and these ladies whose frills and jewels cost more than a life-long labor netted any one of them.

As she contemplated the long line of carriages, which crept slowly through the multitude, something else came back to her—a half-forgotten picture from her school life in the convent. Suddenly there came to her mind the story of Pharaoh, who set out with his war chariots to follow the Israelites through the Red Sea. She saw the waves, which she had always pictured to herself crimson as blood, stand like walls on either side of the Egyptians. Moses then raised his voice, and stretched out his staff over the waters; and the crimson waves of the sea rushed together again and buried Pharaoh and all his host.

She knew that the walls which stood on either side of her here were wilder and greedier than the

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waves of the sea; she knew that all that was needed was a voice—a Moses—to set this human sea in motion, and it would sweep irresistibly on and engulf in waves of crimson the glories of wealth and power.

Her heart beat loudly; she crept shivering into a corner of the carriage. But it was not through fear: it was that those without might not see her,—for she was ashamed of herself in their eyes.

Was this her place—in the soft elegant carriage—among these tyrants and bloodsuckers? Did she not rather belong on the outside in the surging mass among the children of hate?

Half-forgotten thoughts and feelings raised their heads like beasts of prey that had long been held in leash. She suddenly felt strange and homeless in this life of glitter; with a kind of demonic longing she remembered the awful places she had come from.

She clutched at her lace scarf; she was taken with a wild desire to destroy, to tear something to pieces! Just then the carriage turned in under the arch to the hotel.

The servant flung open the door, and with her gracious smile, her quiet aristocratic bearing, she stepped leisurely down.

A young attaché-like creature rushed up, and was overjoyed when she took his arm, even more enraptured when he thought he noticed an un-

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usual glow in her eyes, but in the seventh heaven when he felt her arm tremble.

Proud and filled with great hope, he led her with exquisite grace up the glittering marble steps.

* * *

"Come, tell me, beautiful lady, what friendly fey was it that bestowed upon you this wonderful cradle gift, which makes you and everything that pertains to you stand like something apart? If it is only a flower in your hair, it has its own peculiar charm; as though it had been perfumed by the morning dew. And when you dance, it seems as if the very floor lifted itself to your feet."

The count was himself quite surprised at this long and successful compliment; for he did not as a rule find it easy to express himself connectedly. He expected, too, that the beautiful lady would in some way signify her appreciation.

But he was disappointed. She leaned out over the balcony, where they were enjoying the cool of the evening after the dance, and gazed over the multitude and the carriages, which still continued to come. She seemed not to have comprehended the count's gallantry; instead he heard her whisper the enigmatic word "Pharaoh."

He was just about to voice a complaint when

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she turned, and as she took a step towards the salon, she stopped short in front of him and looked at him with a pair of large, strange eyes he had never seen before.

"I hardly think there was any friendly fey—scarcely even a cradle—present at my birth, my dear Count! But in your remarks about my flowers and my dancing your acumen has hit upon a great discovery. I shall tell you the secret of the morning dew which perfumes them. The dew is tears, my dear Count;—the tears which envy and shame, disappointment and anger, have wept over them. And when it seems to you that the floor undulates when we dance it is because it trembles beneath the hate of millions."

She had spoken with her customary calm, and after a friendly nod she disappeared into the salon.

The count stood alone quite puzzled. He cast a glance out over the mass of people. It was a sight he had often seen; this hydra-headed monster—he had ventured many a poor or indifferent witticism about it. But this evening it occurred to him for the first time that this monster was truly the most horrible environment imaginable for a palace. Strange and unpleasant thoughts swirled about in his brain,—where they had plenty of room. He had been completely shaken out of his ordinary frame of mind, and it took

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him a whole polka before he recovered his customary self.

ARNE GARBORG

DEATH

ARNE GARBORG (1851-1924) came of an old family of freeholder peasants. The religious atmosphere of his home was such that he said of himself he was "born in the seventeenth century." At first under the spell of this early influence, he was later imbued with the radical ideas of the age and became, in fact, one of their ablest exponents in Norway. Later he espoused an undogmatic religion. In one thing, however, he held a consistent course through his whole life, and that was his championship of the peasants and their culture. His first novel, *Peasant Students*, showed the peasant boy adrift from his own home surroundings and standards without being able to amalgamate with any other class. *Men* and *Weary Men* are sinister pictures of debauch and the dissolution that follows in its wake. With the novel *Peace*, based on the religious experiences of his father, Garborg returned to the background of his early home.

The prevailing sombreness of Arne Garborg's works is relieved by a quiet humor which often rises to a trenchant wit. The lyric quality of his genius has found most beautiful expression in the poetic cycle *The Hill Innocent* (*Haugtussa*) which enjoys wide popularity. His only drama, *The Teacher*, has been successfully acted. Most of his books are written in *landsmaal* based on his own local dialect, a language which has especially shown itself adapted to poetic use.

The short story *Death* included in the present volume shows both the originality of his approach and his preoccupation with the questions of death and the hereafter.

Arne Garborg

DEATH

“**H**M!” My uncle cleared his throat, and something like a smile crept over his mouth.

We were sitting on the balcony in the warm afternoon sun looking out over the sea. I had been telling him something of my brother, who had been lost beneath the waves yonder, and now lay cold and white.

“Ugh, Uncle,” I said, as I pulled myself together, “It must be terrible—it must be terrible to die!”

“Hm!—Hm—hm! So you are afraid of Death!”

Uncle looked very feeble, as he sat slouched down in his rocking-chair, bundled up in his sweater and fur coat, although it was midsummer. He had been spry enough in his days—the grandest fellow for miles around. But he was reputed to have lived “recklessly,” and was now a mere shadow of his real self. His features were sallow and sunken; his eyes appeared large and dull and moved listlessly beneath his heavy eyebrows; and over his cheeks and chin his beard

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grew thick and gray, streaked here and there with white,—he shaved no oftener now than every Saturday.

It was a stroke of some sort that had brought him thus low; he had been bedridden the greater part of the winter. He was now in the country “taking the air” and trying to build up his strength again; it was thus that he had come to live with us. He had relatives here and was well known, and besides it was not a bad idea, considering possible eventualities, to live permanently in the home of a doctor.

I was about him constantly. I had always been very fond of him, and he on his part, I now think, had nothing against me. I somehow thought that I helped him while away the hours with my chatter and my stories from the stable and the servants’ quarters. I was at the time, as nearly as I remember, a lad of fifteen or thereabout.

For the most part he was silent and listened to me; it did not seem easy for him to talk. He struggled frequently for breath; his speech was muddled and sounded tired. Every so often he cleared his throat—but that did not seem to help very much. At times it seemed as if his tongue got in his way; the words came thick and clammy, as if numb. His speech clogged especially when he struggled with words that had too many *s*’s in

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them. Only once in a great while did he liven up and his words come more easily. Then I was happy, for I thought now he would soon get better.

"Ah, to be sure. Youth. Death *then* seems terrible."

"Don't you think, Uncle, that it is hard to die?"

"Not at all!"

He spoke with such finality that one might almost have thought he had tried it. I became curious and looked at him inquiringly.

"Death—hm," he cleared his throat, "comes near to us every once in a while. Hm! I—I know it well. It is—not so terrible."

"Ah, tell me, won't you,—if you are not too tired?"

"Hm! Not much to tell. Hm—hm! I have been—in danger of my life many a time. But—it isn't *that* I have in mind. It is—hm!—when one comes—so near Death that one—stands face to face with it. Then one forgets—to be afraid.

"Hm! The first time I was a child of—four or five years. I was lying on the bank of a river—we were living in the country at the time—throwing pebbles into the water. There were a lot of—little trout minnows just off the bank. Whole shoals of them, their mouths wide open, staring in the tepid water. I thought it

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great fun to—hm—s-scare them. However it all came about—hm—a little later—I was myself lying down there in the water. And I thought it was cozy—lying there. Hm! I—lay on my back, and stared straight up into the sky—hm—as through a blue veil. But it was all so clear—and blue. And the light above—hm—very pretty, it seemed to me.

“I grew lighter—and lighter as I lay there—as it grew brighter and—brighter about me. And soft. A white sheen. Not a bit heavy—as if I floated on air, rested on air—soft, light air—mild, fresh, unbelievably clear. I desired nothing—in the world—but to lie there and rest. Hm!”

“Ah, how strange that must have been!”

“Hm! No end of space around me—up and out—in all directions—only crystal clear heaven—which whitened into bright light—white—white. Hm! Glittering, dazzling white light—so thick, so thick—seemed to turn the whole world into a vast bright mist. An endless sea—a sea of clouds—of air and light. And in the center of this sea of clouds I lay and rested. Very comfortable!”

He cleared his throat and took a sip of water from the glass he had standing on a little table next to his chair, and I, who sat there on edge

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and almost trembled with suspense, could tell by his eyes that he was coming to life.

"But wasn't it painful not to be able to breathe?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Not at all; not at all. I didn't notice it. I just felt light and free. Hm! But within this white clear light-mist—long shadows of brown and green moved lightly about—half-shadows—green blotches—long brown branches and stalks—quite tropical—hm—a forest of palm trees—and climbers—and flowers—shadow flowers as large as the moon—wild, luxurious, strange—in groups and curves and long intertwinings—hm! I imagine I must have got in among the tall water-grass—the reeds and other such vegetation to be found at the bottom of deep pools."

He breathed heavily and deeply.

"Were you conscious?"

"Hm! Well, not quite, I guess. You see—it was only a vague impression recorded on the retina and reflected in the brain as through a mist. Hm!

"That was all I knew until I woke up in the arms of my nurse. She was almost beside herself—hm, hm—hm! That puzzled me. I was only sorry I was no longer resting so comfortably. . . . And many a time since have I cursed that—fellow of hers. Why couldn't he have kept

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her occupied another three minutes or so. Then it would have been all over."

These last words pained me, and I wanted to comfort him.

"Ah, but you have had your share of the good things in this life, Uncle."

"Have had!" he smiled dejectedly. The smile would not creep up on one side quite; it turned out awry and looked strangely sickly. "*Have had* . . . is nothing compared to *shall have*—hm! But that you don't understand—yet."

Poor Uncle! Thus it was to be ill!

He took another sip of water and began again. If only he didn't talk too much . . .

"Hm! The second time I was about your age or so.

"It was a day towards spring. The snow still lay thick, but it thawed a little in the middle of the day. The rivers ran high and broke the ice up—in many places.

"My father had let me go with the boys and haul hay and straw home from Aurvik—that crofter's place of ours, you remember—hm. We could no longer cross the ice; we had to go by way of the bridge. But it was the old bridge then; not a real bridge—rather a long footbridge, without railing or anything—planks placed crosswise over a framework of beams—hm. And it was high—so that the ice floe—would not carry it

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away in the spring. Scarcely more than ten feet wide—just sufficient to clear a horse and wagon.

“It was hard and slippery too in the thaw. The runners skidded, and at times they ran out over the edge of the bridge. And down below the river ran swollen and turbulent—sending up white spray—in full flood—with breakers—and roaring and cracking of ice that floated down—huge pieces of ice. I was sitting on the sleigh and dared scarcely look down. It was like looking down into an—abyss.”

“Ugh—!”

“Hm! Hm—hm! On the way home the boys drove ahead. I and Blakken followed with a load of straw. I dared not sit on top the load going over the bridge—I went alongside—followed Blakken—although I wasn’t afraid. Everything had gone well up to that point, and we’d come through the rest of the way too. Blakken was clever; he could manage it alone.

“The first and most difficult stretch I managed first rate; after that I thought I was safe. I kept close to Blakken and tested my courage as I went by looking down into the river; it was beautiful too, it seemed to me—overwhelmingly beautiful. It churned about in yellow eddies—black and deep—. The ice flakes tumbled about edge on edge—up against and over each other.

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And perhaps twenty-four inches between myself and the edge of the bridge.

"All of a sudden—I hardly know how it happened—the load had slid over towards my side, right up against me, and the twenty-four inches had become only twelve—."

He yawned.

"I tried to save myself by moving forwards up to Blakken; but just then the fore part of the load slipped still farther over—"

"Oh, Uncle—!"

"A little—just a little—but the clearance was now so narrow that I could not get forward. Whoa, Blakken! I dropped the reins, and thought to save myself towards the rear. Just then the rear of the wagon skidded over, too—"

"I declare!" I exclaimed as I seized the arm of his chair.

"And then the whole of the load slid another inch over—and still another inch—and came to a stop."

He yawned long and deeply. I held fast to the chair frantically.

"Hm—hm! Every avenue of escape was closed. Between the load and the brink the distance was so scant I'm sure the toes of my boots projected over the edge. I had faced about with my back to the load, and had crooked my back just a bit, and stood bending slightly forward—out

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over the ice floe—with arms stretched out—swaying to and fro, as it were, in an uncertain balance.”

“Oh, Uncle, hurry up!”

“I could get no hold on the load; the reins I had let go. If I but raised a hand or moved a muscle—I’d plunge headlong down into the river without fail.”

He yawned. His fingers twitched and moved. He drank some water.

“Then I saw Death face to face!

“Hm! I knew that in another moment I’d be lying down below among the ice flakes. There—on that particular spot—I wanted to strike—not in the churning eddy, but to one side—and there I fully expected to be lying the very next breath—my balance was growing more precarious.

“That moment I became calm. I fixed my eyes on the spot I expected to strike; I familiarized myself with it; and all at once it seemed to me nice and soft. It seemed as if the river in that spot took on living features—calm, peaceful features. With one large dim eye, as it were, it looked up at me—poor soul, as I balanced dizzily on the edge of the bridge. And it seemed to be speaking to me. ‘Don’t be afraid; I am not so cold as I appear.’ Well, as I say, I became calm then; the world was of a sudden nothing to me;

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it was all over. I'd be down there—shortly. I surrendered completely, and from then on I felt strangely safe.

“Just as I felt I was losing my balance—I became conscious of something between the fingers of my left hand—a straw.”

“Ah!”

“A bit of straw. I haven't the slightest idea now how it had come there; nor do I know or understand how it happened—that just at that moment I got a hold—a real hold—and straightened myself up—and turned about—and pressed close to the load. The only thing I remember is that the boys then came running up to help me, but by that time I was safe.”

I breathed a long sigh of relief. Uncle emptied his glass and smiled just a bit. His arm twitched, and he stretched himself in his chair.

“Hm! After it was all over I became frightened—so frightened that I shook . . . But when one is face to face with Death one feels calm and safe. It's not so terrible.”

Again it occurred to me that it might be better for Uncle perhaps if he did not dwell quite so much on such things just now, and I sought to turn the conversation to other things.

“That reminds me, Uncle,” I said, to change the subject, “have you had a chance to take a look

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at father's new dun horse? Don't you think he's first rate?"

Horses were about the only thing he still cared about, and for a time death was forgotten, as we talked of the horse.

From this the conversation turned to a horse he had himself owned at one time, and before I knew it we were once more hedging around the question of death.

"Ah yes, Borken! Hm! He's old now, poor fellow, and can only serve before the plow. But in his youth he was a spirited animal—hm—hm—hm, and as such he was instrumental in my meeting Death face to face a third time."

"Ah, you mean the time that that young lady from the theater came to her end. How many years ago is that?"

I wanted very much to hear him tell more of his experiences. And perhaps he wasn't so weak after all.

"Oh—hm—that was before your time," he began. "Borken I had purchased in Denmark, and he was a noble animal. Hm! He had the finest head I have ever seen on any horse—and legs—and such carriage; but—hm—that's something, I suppose, you don't understand—yet. And such ears—so alive and so small—ah, hm. Even yet it does me good to think of Borken. Poor

Told In Norway

fellow! He is old now. He is through as I am through. So it goes!

"Hm! Well, I returned home with the horse, and began driving him every day. Everybody soon took a liking to Hannibal. This Lizzy—poor thing!—became so infatuated with him that she came and introduced herself to me—merely to have me take her driving. Hm—hm! But—well, you will notice, Hans, misfortune generally follows women. Hm—hm! Strange women one should always be wary of—in every way. Hm! In every way!

"Well, Borken somehow became frightened, and, unfortunately, just then Lizzy was holding the reins. It all happened in a flash. Before I could seize the reins and get Borken under control, one of the wheels skidded off into the ditch. Hm! The carriage smashed into a fence and was completely demolished in an instant. Lizzy struck the fence head on—awful—head on—I was thrown a bit farther and received a less violent blow. But I dropped out of the world too; the only difference was that I woke up again—in this world. So it goes. I have only a faint remembrance of a wild run—a crash—confusion—wheels and carriage pell-mell in the air above. . . Hm! I didn't feel any pain. And she hadn't felt any either; I could tell that when I saw her afterwards. Her face bore only that tense look

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which had come over her when the horse ran away; she lay as if she were still holding the reins. About her mouth a look of determination—as if she fully expected to manage it. Hm! Poor thing! I felt so sorry for her. Yet death had come to her easily.”

The evening sun was sinking lower and lower. I leaned against the railing and scanned the clouds. He sat staring, with lifeless eyes now, out over the sea, or, it may be, into his inner self.

“... And now when I was taken ill,” he continued, “It was Death again that I saw. Hm! I rose that morning as usual. I was getting ready to dress, when the floor seemed as if to disappear from underneath my feet. . . . I sought for a foothold—but in vain. Everything failed me—slid away—and a power which there was no resisting—hm—dragged me to the floor. I was more surprised and confused than frightened. Hm! Ah, that power which there is no resisting—when one senses that—one becomes calm.

“When I came to I was only a ponderous—hm—weight—that sank and sank deep down into something soft and dark—heavy as lead—but weak, weak, pitifully weak. I was sore in every nerve. So heavy—and a little dizzy. The bed was, as it were, afloat with me, and dived deep. . . . Hm. I wasn’t particularly conscious. Only in a

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heavy daze. To open an eye or to move a finger—ah, impossible. It didn't even occur to me. The only thing I wanted to do was to rest. To rest with every drop of blood in me, every cell, every thread and fiber—to sink but deeper into rest—still further into oblivion. To go to sleep—to go to sleep completely. That there might be nothing but night. Hm—hm—hm! I knew of course that this night was death, but I longed for it just as fiercely. I longed with a numb satisfied calm, and I felt sure it would come. Even to be conscious was such an effort—alas! Ah, to stretch out and die—what a consolation that would be—what a comfort! That's as much as one fears Death when one comes near enough! Hm!

“Even yet I feel at times that I could simply lean back in my chair and expire. And that is such a comforting thought.

“It is downright foolish to picture—Death as a skeleton with a scythe. Hm—that is an invention of the monks. Those people never saw Death. It is no skeleton; it is a kind merciful deity. A man or woman—serious and pale—stern to look at—hm! But as it comes nearer this stern face appears quiet and kind. And its eyes are large and deep-set and overflowing with sympathy. Hm! Yes—with sympathy!

“Hm—hm! Indeed, it intends us no harm. It

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envelops us in soft arms and carries us off into a dream. A light pleasant dream. Then it builds dreams all around us—and they roll round and round and quiver. And it grows light—as when the morning mist rises. That is the other life!”

I leaned out over the balcony and scanned the heavens. I stared and stared till the clouds above took on the form of human features. Stern, serious features, which grew gradually less and less stern—less and less stern the longer I looked at them.

AMALIE SKRAM

A ROSE

AMALIE SKRAM (1847-1905) whose maiden name was Alver, was a native of Bergen. An unhappy, disharmonious home gave her nature a twist from childhood. Brilliantly beautiful, she was at seventeen coerced into an unhappy marriage from which she freed herself by divorce thirteen years later. For a time she devoted herself to newspaper work and thus came in contact with the eminent literary men of her day. She married the Danish author Erik Skram, and although she was later divorced from him, she continued to live in Denmark and to write under his name.

Amalie Skram's first important novel was *Constance Ring* (1885) in which she attacked the immorality of men, writing with a frankness that no Norwegian woman had ventured upon before. *Fru Inez, Betrayed*, and *Lucie* are all dreary pictures of unhappy marriages. Her greatest work, however, is the four volume novel cycle *The Hellemysr Folk* (1887-1898). It is a terrible picture of a poor family which by all the laws of heredity and environment must remain the degenerate product of vice, crime, and poverty. There is a finality of hopelessness in the book which is characteristic of her authorship. In her frankly naturalistic treatment and in her passionate social indignation she distinctly belonged to the literary school of her day, but she lacked the optimistic belief in a brighter future which inspired her contemporaries. Though she lived in Denmark, her subjects were usually taken from Norway, and the scene of *The Hellemysr Folk* was laid near her native town, Bergen.

Amalie Skram

A ROSE

“**T**HIS is certainly not very cheerful, is it?” he said, as he turned with difficulty in his bed to face his wife, who had just come into the room, and stood some distance away, leaning against an old bureau. She was fair and blond, large of waist, with pale deep-set eyes, and scant hair, that had been frizzed over the forehead with a curling iron. Her morning dress, of yellowish-brown material, trimmed with dark braid, was spotted and worn, and hung loosely about her form.

“But what *is* really the matter with you?” she asked. Her tone was half derisive, half reproachful.

He ran his fingers through his thick black hair, raised his pale face, which was framed by a dark beard, and looked at her.

She gave him a second fleeting glance. A glance that pierced him to the quick. “Evil? Could they be evil—those eyes?” he speculated, as he gazed steadily at her.

After a pause she spoke as if into space. “Is to-morrow Sunday?”

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"How should I know!" he answered.

"You perhaps don't keep track of the days?"

He rested his aching head on his right hand and eyed her intently. This woman whom he had loved above everything in the world!

She shifted her position, though still leaning against the bureau. The frail old thing creaked.

Then it came. "Nine days from to-day is your birthday. How shall we celebrate it?"

"But I thought I was going to the hospital."

"Oh, by that time, of course, you'll be home again," she said wearily.

"Oh—but I won't. That is, of course,—if I am dead by that time, perhaps my body will come home."

She uttered a cry of joy. So it seemed to him, and the chills ran down his spine. In reality she had merely burst forth in a boisterous laugh. "You die! And pray what should I then do with your body?"

He lay in the same position, his head on his hand, and continued to stare at her. This thought, that had so often of late suggested itself to him, but which he never had given a place in his heart—it was true then after all. She would welcome his death as a blessed relief!

Naturally!

This then was the way it had ended. He who

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had bound himself to her in such endless and joyous trust and confidence!

'Twas a myth that two people should become as one! Stuff and nonsense! No! One was master, the other slave. Or else they were enemies.

Ah, if only the world were not so full of fairy tales!

— — —

She still stood leaning against the bureau, and her eyes kept roaming about uneasily.

"Oh, I'm so tired!" she said suddenly, and seized her thin-haired head in her large white hands. "You are astonished, of course, that I do not take this illness of yours more mournfully than I do. But I can't. I have given you all I have to give. I have nothing more."

"No," he answered after a bit, "I realize that."

Then he fell to musing. What she said was only too true. She had labored and struggled to make them both comfortable; but her endowments, excellent as they were, had not been enough. Or perhaps that which she gave was not what he needed. One thing was certain: no one in the world had been so kind to him, and no one so fiendish. A strangely narrow and shriveled soul she was. So matter of fact and convention bound. Ah, how different they were!

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He let his head fall back slowly on the pillow.

"In other words," he said, "we have wasted our lives for the sake of each other."

"Yes!" She began to pace the floor back and forth. "That's about it."

He turned his head and followed her. How ungainly and clumsy she was—with that small yellow head, those white paw-like hands, and that huge paunch. A little curl of hair played up and down her fair neck with every step she took. He kept following it with his eyes, and suddenly, in a momentary flash, he saw her as he had seen her when he first loved her, and she loved him. The memory warmed his heart.

And here he lay, frail and feeble, ready to go to the hospital. He wondered—would she go with him? Not that he—he much preferred to go there alone; but he was so weak. Physically he needed some one to help him.

An hour or two later the ambulance came.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" she asked, and stood still.

"No, thanks! I'll manage by myself all right."

She left him and closed the door behind her.

"If she were not a part of your life—did not exist," he mused, as he instinctively folded his hands over his breast, "would you then be more contented?—Perhaps not!"

He thought of his half-grown daughter, who

sat in the room to the rear studying her lessons. He meant to go away without saying farewell to her. Oh God, how ghastly it was to have brought children into the world—when one was so overwhelmingly convinced of the misery of existence! And, furthermore, this daughter behaved at times so strangely to him. She resembled her mother only too well. There was in her tone and mien something that took the mother's part against him, something almost hostile.

Then—he remembered the days gone by, the time when she was a wee little thing, and all the joy they had shared with each other. But that was no more. That, too, was no more—as everything else was no more.

This wife—this flabby, positive woman—who could talk and chatter with one and all, who had the air of wordly refinement and Christian piety,—she could for all he cared——!

Ah, how different they were!

— — —

He got out of bed and dressed himself. His knees shook, and as he packed his bag the sweat poured down his face in great drops.

Alas, how he missed a wife! A wife in whose tender love and sympathy he might have found

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comfort and cure for body and soul! His wife was no wife at all.

When he got to the hospital he would have a nurse.

Thank God for that!

— — —

When at length he was ready with his dressing and his packing, he walked shakily into his study.

He wanted to write a letter to his daughter, a letter for her to read when she was grown up—in case he should die at the hospital, as he was sure he would.

From within the living room he heard strange sounds. What could that possibly be? He listened, and then it dawned on him that it was his wife snoring.

He sat down at his desk and wrote:

Do you remember, little Karen, remember what a lot of fun we used to have at one time—you, a wee little girl, and I, your old, happy, loving father? Do you remember the songs I sang evenings, when mother was out, and you were in bed, and I wanted you to go to sleep? I sang for you—I, who never could sing. But you always asked for more, and you thought I could sing.

This letter you will not read until after I am dead. You must not mourn for me, my daughter, but merely treasure me in your memory. Death will take us all, you see, sooner or later. Do you remember when I ran my fingers down your spine and you laughed and said that I tickled you?

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When the sun goes down, when the moon rises, when I know that the stars twinkle outside, when the wind sighs through the trees, then I think of you, Karen, and I see you as when you were my own wee little girl.

Much more I should like to write you, little Karen, but I am ill and weary unto death, and I have little strength.

Farewell, my daughter! Your father has loved you, and he will think of you even in his last hour. Try to be an upright and honest woman!

He placed the letter in an envelope, wrote Karen's name on the outside, and hid it in the drawer in the writing desk. Then he wiped the sweat from his face, rose, and opened the door to the living room.

His wife started up from the chaise longue where she had been sleeping.

"Now what is it you want?"

"I'm going."

"Oh—ugh! This nonsense about the hospital! But that's your affair."

"But surely you can see how ill I am," he pleaded. "Only this—that I never eat anything."

"Oh, it seems to me your appetite's not so bad," and she arched her white neck.

Her words struck him like a painful blow. He was so in need of kindness, now that he was about to leave his poor excuse for a home and prepare to die.

"Well, I must be off. The carriage is waiting."

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She put on her wraps to accompany him.

A little later they drove away.

He felt so miserable, so exhausted, as he sat in the carriage, that he could scarcely hold himself upright. He had a sleepy desire to rest his head against this woman's shoulder, if only because she was a human being like himself. But she sat and talked in her shrill shrieky voice—this voice he once had loved—talked about everything and nothing. He leaned back in the corner of the carriage. The tears ran fast and silently down his cheeks.

— — —

The carriage stopped at the hospital entrance. She pawed her way out, but stood irresolute, and mumbled something about the hospital being closed.

"Well, can't you ring!" he exclaimed. Good God! what a woman!

Very shortly the door opened, and she preceded him up the stairs, through the long corridors, into a room that had been reserved for him. A dark-haired kindly nurse and a young fellow with braid on his coat showed the way.

"Well, goodbye!" she said hastily, and laid her hands loosely on his shoulders. She held her face up to his, and that which was intended as a

Amalie Skram

kiss seemed to him a cold and clammy touch of the lips.

— — —

The days and the weeks went by. He lay in his bed, quiet, dead tired. His wife came to visit him. She brought letters and newspapers. At times Karen came with her. Then always he had to weep. He held his hands to his eyes that the child might not see.

"What *is* really the matter with him?" she asked the physician in charge.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "He has never really regained his strength after the accident on that drive last spring."

"But it isn't anything serious, is it?"

Again the doctor shrugged his shoulders, but this time he said nothing.

She read in his eyes that there was no hope, and she sensed, as it were, a vast burden falling from her.

It was so quiet where he lay in his bed, underneath the white hospital covers. The gas light behind the head of the bed burned low. He could find no rest. Every moment he wanted to change his position and make himself more comfortable, but he lacked the energy. Now and then a tear rolled down his cheek. He would

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have liked to wipe it away, but he was unable to lift his hand.

How dreary and empty and beggared his life had become! He who had hoped and dreamed such great things!

But presumably all people dreamed and hoped great things!

He thought most about little Karen. He thought of her when, as a four-year-old girl, she had come to him in her night-dress to say good night. She had never been satisfied until he had said good night to her feet too. "This is Inger, and this is Trine," and with that she had stuck her soft white feet in his face, first one, then the other.

Good God, he wondered how she would fare in the world!

He would never know, for this night he would die.

Alas! alas! He was so tired, so tired!

But to die thus—all alone! No hand to grasp in farewell!

He remembered his parents, who were dead, his beloved brothers and sisters, who were likewise dead, and suddenly he was overjoyed at the thought that he might now possibly see them again.

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His thoughts went round and round. He lay as in a trance.

— — —

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son——.”

Ah, that was a lovely thought! An expression of what the world's most kindly spirits had ex-cogitated as a solace and a comfort for dying and despairing souls. No one—no one should be damned!

Who loseth his life shall find it. Well, he was to lose his now. He was to die.

But could nature be so extravagant as also to let his soul die? His soul! What was his soul? A loud groan escaped him.

The nurse came in and offered him something to drink, but he lay motionless on his pillow, and she went away again.

The lilies in the field—all the glory of the world rises up anew,—sounded softly through him. Ah, he was so tired! Death! Death, come! Come soon!

Of a sudden a spasm passed through him.

He opened his half-dazed eyes and stared ahead as though he glimpsed a vision into the vast universe. Before him he saw a giant rose, a huge sphere of a rose, larger than the earth. The glow of sunlight played upon it and gilded

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its millions of velvety leaves. It was fragrant, and it glowed towards him. It sang and sang in mysterious muffled tones. And in the center, in the purple and gold leaves, lay millions of liberated souls, almost invisible. That is the place of many mansions,—ran through his dying consciousness.

He wanted to stretch out his hands towards the beautiful fragrant rose, but his arms lay heavy, and his fingers clutched the cover feebly.

From head to foot his body quivered in another spasm.

He was dead!

A peaceful smile transfigured his white rigid face.

JACOB BREDA BULL

COFFEE-KARI

JACOB BREDÅ BULL (1853-) is the son of a clergyman in Österdalen. He studied theology, but instead of seeking a charge, he became a writer and editor. He began his literary work as a bitter opponent of the prevailing literary tendencies and wrote a play, *Without Responsibility*, in which he took issue with the theory of heredity in Ibsen's *Ghosts*. An extremely prolific writer, he is best known for his popular historical novels and biographies of great Norwegians, and for his stories of his native valley. In Österdalen, the broad Norwegian valley not far from Zorn's Dalecarlia, he found the background of deep forests and rushing mountain torrents which is described in *Coffee-Kari*. He found also a vigorous race of people who were not only tillers of the soil, but knew the adventurous life of hunting and lumbering. Besides numerous short stories and sketches collected in a five volume edition of *Folk Tales*, he has written a group of novels with the scene laid in Österdalen. In the most recent of these, *Sir Samuel* and its sequel *Sir Samuel's Kingdom*, he has described the life of a clergyman a hundred years ago when the clergyman was both father and government to the whole district. His last book, *The Child*, is an argument against birth control, cast in the form of a novel. Bull lives in Copenhagen.

Jacob Breda Bull

COFFEE-KARI

THE king's highway up the valley of the Rena, as it passes the lower portion of western Li, follows the floor of the valley through tall, cool pine forests, dense and romantic. A wild, fresh odor rises from the carpet of needles and moss. Now and then grouse whirl up from the roadside; fishes ripple the black, still surface of the river.

Straight across the valley the eastern slopes lie bare, from the lone tenant farm at the river's edge to the mountain heights above. Great grayish-brown dunes lie tumbled along the slope, as if giants in past ages had plowed the mountain sides with gigantic plows. Not a tree. Only an expanse of charred stumps. Here and there leafy saplings struggle into life; raspberries and blackberries speckle the rocky acres with red; at intervals a half-burned pine raises its head; and deep in the desolate domain a pair of eagles have built their nest. Where the rock-slides have spread their worst confusion and where the declivities fall most abruptly, the foaming mill-stream grumbles a monotonous requiem.

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Not more than thirty years ago the eastern slopes were as rich and luxuriant as the western. The forest rose tall and proud; bird notes broke the silence; elk grazed in the thickets; and bears made their dens in the rocky clefts. Then came the terrible enemy—the forest-fire, and in twenty-four hours the entire slope was laid waste for a hundred years to come. And as the fire raged most malignantly, a bent old woman stood near the tenant farm down by the river gazing up the slope, laughing and spitting, while her swarthy eyes sparkled, and her fingers, like the claw of a bird of prey, gripped the rags that hung about her shrunken hips.

It was Lorens-Kari, Coffee-Kari, as they called her after that day. She it was who had started the fire.

* * *

Lorens-Kari had Gypsy blood in her veins, and had got her prefix from a lame tailor called Whinny-Lorens. Lorens lived alone in the far southern part of Östlien, on a little plot that went by name of Blændvasströen.

He was the parish fiddler and well liked by every one; wherever he appeared life and gayety came in his train, though he was by nature rather given to melancholy.

One snowy winter night, when Whinny-Lorens

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came home from a Christmas party in the western part of the parish, he discovered a freezing black-eyed girl huddled in his doorway.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"A Gypsy, God help me," answered a youthful voice that sounded pitifully old.

"Gypsies must stick together," said Lorens, laughing in his peculiar way. He took the girl into the house, and there she stayed.

But from the very moment Lorens-Kari was domiciled in the parish, people lost their liking for Whinny-Lorens. Whenever he showed himself at a dance, he had the girl with him; and fighting and bad blood dogged her steps. Besides, people said that Lorens never could draw real music from his fiddle unless Kari was on the floor; but if he only could see her swarthy eyes and her mysterious soft smile, sparks flew from his fiddle, and the dancing ran fiery riot beneath the beamed ceilings.

So matters went on until Lorens-Kari reached the age of twenty.

About that time the priest one fine day called Lorens into his study and talked to him at some length.

"You are too much of a man to be consorting with a girl like her," he said at last, standing at the open door as Lorens was about to leave the house.

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"There are plenty of people that wouldn't mind keeping company with her," Lorens answered rudely.

"That's true, unfortunately," said the priest, turning on his heel and shutting the door.

Lorens stood staring at the closed door. Then he turned and walked away.

At evening when he came home, Kari was sitting by the hearth, sewing. Supper was waiting for him, but he did not sit down. He remained standing by the fireplace, staring fixedly at her.

"You'll not be going to any more dances," he said suddenly.

She looked up in surprise. "Not going any more!"

"I'll not have it," he said sharply; "and there are others that won't, too."

For a while she sat looking into space, as if living it all over again, hour by hour. "You want me to leave you," she said in a low voice.

He answered not a word. Then she rose slowly and, without looking at him, turned and climbed the steps to the loft. He remained behind, debating with himself. He heard her footsteps above him. He heard a pair of shoes drop to the floor. Once more he heard her walking. There was a short silence while she tied her clothing into a bundle; then she came down with the bundle in her left hand, a black ker-

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chief around her head. She walked directly towards him. "Thanks so much for—" she left the sentence unfinished and held out her hand. He did not take it. Then she looked at him. His face was pale.

"Are you sick?" she asked abruptly.

"I suppose I soon shall be," he answered—leaning against the wall.

She laid the bundle on a stool, and stood with bowed head for some time, looking fixedly at nothing.

"I'll get some one else to take my place," she spoke in uncertain tone, and picked up her bundle.

"Let be!" he said in a strained voice, as he seized the bundle and kept her from taking it.

She retained her hold on it a long time, and fastened her black, burning, questioning eyes on his face. He smiled and pulled harder. At length she relaxed her hold. He took the bundle, walked a few steps, and threw it up into the loft. "You must understand that this won't do, at all," he said softly. She made no response, but only stood staring into the fire.

"We'll just have to make a change," he continued, gently stroking her hair meanwhile.

"All right, make a change then," she answered, standing immovable as before.

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That same autumn Whinny-Lorens married Kari.

During the years that followed, strange things kept happening in the parish. People were always quarreling, misfortunes pursued the cattle, and mysterious nocturnal visitations disturbed the neighboring farmsteads. At Helge's they found the bull one morning with his horns sawed off. The sheriff's horse had to be dragged hamstrung out of the Hornsett Morass; and under the barn at Utistu inhuman laughter filled the night hours during an entire summer. For all this Lorens-Kari got the blame, and hatred of her rose to such a pitch that the whole parish shunned her. Lorens had very little to say for himself; but he grew thinner and smaller, and his light blue, soft eyes took on an unnatural largeness in his wizened face.

Blændvasströen long remained unvisited; but gradually people began to gather there on Sunday evenings. The parish vagabonds and the poor girls that lived on the scattered tenant farms came, singly or in groups; Lorens sat half drunk by the well grinding at his fiddle, and the dancing went on, with shrieks and commotion, far into the night. In the midst of the confusion Lorens-Kari passed to and fro, quick of movement, sharp of eye, leading a little fair-haired girl with swarthy eyes, wherever she went.

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One day the sheriff appeared at Blændvass-tröen. The little girl was standing on the stone step before the door; a black cat with white paws sat on the refuse heap eating fish bones. From the door, which stood ajar, came wreaths of smoke.

"Is your father at home?" asked the sheriff.

"Ye-es!" answered a piping voice.

The cat shook her head, stepped gingerly over the damp refuse, slunk along to the well, looked back at the sheriff, and disappeared from sight.

"Where is he?"

"He's lying down." She looked at the stranger, her eyes big with surprise. The sheriff stepped inside.

On the bed in the middle of the room lay Whinny-Lorens. On the window-sill lay a sewing basket and a ball of yarn; at the other side, a worn deck of cards, yellow with age. Lorens-Kari stood by the hearth drying some wooden dishes with an old gray linen cloth. A dusty shaft of sunshine fell athwart the table. The place reeked with the mingled odors of poverty and coffee. From the bench came now and again a whiff of wax and new cloth, from a half-finished coat. The coat must have been recently pressed, for there was a suggestion of damp, burned wool, in the close air of the room.

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"I wonder if I might talk with you a bit," said the sheriff, looking about the room.

Lorens rose and sat on the edge of the bed, his large, tired eyes fixed on his wife, who had turned and was gazing sharply at the sheriff.

"That's all right, you may listen if you want to," added the sheriff; "I've just one word to say—this dancing business has got to stop."

Kari stood with both hands at her hips.

"Hm!—Everything has to stop for poor people," she broke out bitterly.

The sheriff looked at her with anger in his eyes, and said, "Trouble always follows in your footsteps, Kari."

"I'm not the only one," Kari answered sharply and turned her back on him. "Anyway, the sheriff makes his living from trouble," she added, looking at him over her shoulder.

"That will be enough from you," Lorens interrupted, hobbling out onto the floor. Then he surveyed the sheriff, up and down. "Are you going to drive me out of the parish?" he asked loudly.

The sheriff stood coolly looking him in the eye. "Perhaps it would be best for you and all concerned if you did go now, Lorens," he said.

Lorens gazed at him in silence for a while. "No! There's no use bringing up anything like that, you see," he turned suddenly and limped

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toward the bed, turned around again, looked long at the sheriff, and added, "I was born here—and I'll die here." Then he sat down on the bed.

"Suit yourself; you heard what I said," the sheriff answered, and was about to depart. Kari instantly stepped in his way, her sombre eyes moist and flaming. "If it wasn't for this little girl, I'd turn my back on you and the whole parish—and you, too," she added, rushing over to the bed and shaking her fist in her husband's face. He brushed her arm aside, without any show of emotion. She turned on her heel, dashed out of the door in a blind fury, across the yard, across the paddock—and into the woods.

The sheriff did not move. For some time not a sound was to be heard. Finally he said in a low voice, "You see, the thing has to end somehow."

Lorens drew a deep breath. "Well, I might as well quit now as any other time."

The sheriff took his departure. For a long time the tiny room was quiet. Lorens sat with pale face, staring into a void. Now and again he cast his eyes toward the woods where Kari had disappeared, and then scrutinized the palms of his hands. The door opened slowly. His little girl sidled in.

"Little Ingrid," he said tenderly.

"Ye-es," she answered in a voice like the mew-ing of a cat.

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"Come here." She hurried toward him. "Little Ingrid." He took her cold hand. She stood close beside the bed, embarrassed. He stroked her thin little shoulders. "Little Ingrid." Then he burst into tears, threw himself down on the bed, and turned his face to the wall. The little girl, at a loss, stood her ground for a moment or two, with downcast eyes. Then she turned, afraid, and ran out.

The next day Lorens had disappeared. When Kari returned she found the little girl lying asleep across the bed with furrows of tears down her cheeks. Her father was gone and had taken his fiddle with him. Three days Kari hunted for him, in the forest, in lonely, outlying barns, along the banks of the river up and down stream, but found no trace of him. On the eighth day the cowherd at Helge's came home from East Mountain and told that he had heard the most mournful sounds of a fiddle from the morass near Mistern. There must be underground folk there! When the sheriff got wind of it, he dispatched searchers to the spot. And there they found him, in the dense underbrush along the river, dead. He lay with his face down and his lame foot drawn up under him, as if he had felt cold. The old cracked fiddle lay by his side.

The day after Whinny-Lorens had been carried off to the valley, no smoke rose from the chimney

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of Blændvasströen. Kari and her little girl had left the parish; and nothing more was heard of them for many a year.

* * *

Thirty years passed by. During all that time Blændvasströen stood deserted and decrepit in the forest solitudes. Fishermen and berry-pickers, who from time to time ventured to peer through the darkened panes, saw no change. The same kettle stood on the hearthstone; the cup remained untouched on the table; the sewing basket and the drab deck of cards still lay in the window; and on the bed they could just discern the worn fur robe. But no one saw that under the bed lay a desiccated skeleton and some patches of fur, the remains of an old black cat with white paws.

The story of Lorens and Kari had assumed legendary form in the parish, and the boys and girls would stand staring open-mouthed at the sheriff when of a winter evening he recounted the history of Lorens-Kari. "I should never have bought timber land in Östlien if she had stayed in the parish," he was accustomed to close his yarn, as he lit his meerschauum pipe, which had grown cold while he was occupied with his narrative.

* * *

Told In Norway

On a summer morning in September the sheriff drove out to inspect a road that ran south through the valley. It was early; hoar frost covered the ground; the road was frozen just enough to sink a little beneath the wheels. Down at Kvarsevjen, where freshwater herring were commonly to be caught in the autumn, he met Sjuluser, who came hobbling along carrying his catch.

"How's the fishing?" asked the sheriff, stopping his horse.

"The fishing would be all right if people would only leave the tackle alone," was the answer.

"Gypsies, eh!" the sheriff ventured.

"I shouldn't wonder!" answered Sjuluser.

"Well, so long!" The sheriff set his horse in motion.

"So long!" Sjuluser limped away.

The sheriff drove on. The morning chill was like a refreshing bath to him. Now and then he turned his eyes toward Östlien, where his timber grew dense and green. He inspected closely the graveled approaches to bridges, noticed here and there a leaning fence post, and, before he knew it, he felt the chill darkness of the forest as he drew near the curve at Hornsett, where the pine trees rose cool and tall, like the pillars in a church.

The sheriff wrapped his cloak about him and drove on; it was getting colder. As he passed

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through the thickest part of the forest he met an old woman dragging a low four-wheeled cart. It must be a Gypsy! He stopped his horse. The old woman also stopped to return his gaze.

"Good morning!" He scrutinized her closely.

"Good morning!" she responded, in an insinuating tone. A pair of swarthy eyes pierced into his own, and made him shudder.

"Where do you hail from?" he asked.

The woman straightened up, and seemed to grow taller. "Oh, I belong to the parish, sheriff—in a way."

The sheriff started. "It isn't you, is it Kari?" he mumbled.

"Yes, Lord bless us, it's me, all right!" she answered meekly, as before.

"That's queer," the sheriff muttered, as if to himself.

"Yes, it is queer."

"Are you intending to stay in the parish now?" he asked, with some hesitation.

"Yes, that was my idea."

"Well, I suppose you have learned better manners, haven't you?"

"We learn by imitating our betters," she answered.

"It's the safest thing to do—you mark my word!" He looked sharply at her.

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She cast her eyes down. "It's the safest thing."

"Anybody with you?" The sheriff indicated the cart by a movement of his head.

"No, I am alone."

"What about your little girl? Perhaps she's married somewhere?"

Kari seemed to grow smaller, and her dark eyes were suffused with a film. "She died the first winter, on Mount Dovre."

The sheriff started, and turned his eyes away. "That's too bad!" he said.

She gazed at him a long time without saying a word, her eyes darting fire, as they searched his face. "Yes, it was a shame, a rotten shame!" she said hoarsely; then she added after a little, "God have mercy on us all!"

Silence fell. The sheriff examined the handle of his whip, and adjusted the dash curtain. "Well, goodby, Kari; I suppose I'll hear from you later." He grasped the reins.

She kept looking at him intently. "Perhaps you will," she said meekly as before, and started off, drawing the wagon after her.

The sheriff drove on, but felt impelled to turn his head and look at her once more. Then his eyes rested with speculative interest on Östlien, where his timber grew green and straight in the morning sun.

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Lorens-Kari plodded straight through the parish to Blændvasströen. She met few people; and none recognized her. When she reached the house she stood still a long while as if reluctant at the thought of going inside. At last she dug an old key out of one of the bundles in the cart, opened the door, and went in. She came running out again instantly, sat down on the stone step before the door, and remained sitting there. After a little she rose slowly and went in once more. She walked to the hearth and moved the kettle to the window and looked out over the fields; now and then she relieved her feelings by suppressed groans, as if she were suffering bodily pain. She caught sight of the old dead cat under the bed. "Good Lord!" Then she climbed up to the loft, where tattered clothes hung on the rafters and the little cradle stood in a corner. She threw herself down beside it and lay there rocking her head in her hands as if she were young, broke into wild plaintive snatches of something like a song, and groaned two or three times as if attempting to regain control of herself. Suddenly she rose to her feet, clenched both hands, cried and screamed. But the dead narrow room gave back no sound. She turned, ran rapidly down the stairs, took the axe, went out into the yard, and broke a paling or two from the tumble-down fence; these she chopped into

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kindling, and then hung the coffee kettle on its hook and lighted the fire.

Next day the neighbors saw a surprising sight. Smoke was rising from the chimney at Blandvasströen, which had sent forth no such token for thirty years.

* * *

It was a warm evening in summer. A blue haze lay o'er the valley, and tawny thunder clouds retreated toward the eastern horizon. The brooks ran shrunken among dry rocks; the king's highway lay deep in dust that yielded under foot. Forest and fields thirsted after rain, and on the mountains the reindeer moss, dry and brittle, crunched beneath the slippery soles of shoes. Throughout the parish, haying was about to begin. People idled at home waiting for a fall of dew sufficient to afford purchase to the scythes. It was past ten o'clock. On most of the farms people had gone to bed. Here and there young folks sat out in the yard talking in low tones; at intervals the laugh of a man or the stifled shriek of a girl was borne to the ear from some distant place.

The tawny clouds changed to a menacing blue. Warm and hazy, night sank over the forest; bats played their noiseless crazy games among the buildings, where swarms of mosquitoes rose and

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fell; over the meadows gray nocturnal butterflies dipped and mounted again; and in the shadows among brown grass stalks fading bluebells cast a dying romantic gleam. Gray and more gray sank the night. A solitary raven croaked far in the depths of the woods; a door slammed in the distance—and then all sounds were stilled. The valley lay asleep, warm and quiet.

Midnight had come. Up the hill at Bergsli a man limped rapidly. He turned in at the sheriff's gate, and pounded at the door. A gray cat sitting on the flagstones fled terrified like a shadow. The sheriff jumped up, heavy with sleep, threw on his clothes and dashed out. "What's up?" he demanded testily, as he stood holding the doorlatch and peering out.

"The forest is burning," answered a breathless voice. It was Sjuluser.

The sheriff leaped out, without a word. Sjuluser pointed off to the south.

Out of the darkness of the night a thin gleaming ray broke over Östlien, and grayish smoke drifted northward above the meadows bordering on the river. A chill struck at the sheriff's heart. It was his own timber that was afire. "Lorens-Kari," he said, aloud but to himself.

Sjuluser looked at the sheriff, but did not dare to utter a word.

Of a sudden the church bells began to clamor.

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Like a wild reproach their fearful jangling rang through the night, again and again, louder and louder, till it filled and dominated all the recesses between the mountains. Every last man in the valley started from his sleep, recaptured his senses—and knew what it meant.

“It’s a forest fire!” ran the refrain from a hundred farms.

Soon dark groups stood staring and pointing and talking on every elevation in the whole valley. In Östlien a broad, ravenous belt of fire slowly pushed its way up the slope; beneath lay Bländvasströen, the houses distinctly visible in the flickering illumination that broke the darkness of the night.

The stolid, meditative mountaineers, unnerved for awhile, stood stock still, gazing at the scene. Then there was sudden activity. Axes appeared; lunches were hastily prepared; horses were hitched to their carts. Women ran to and fro, wailing and working; and through it all sounded the alarm, the church bell’s stern voice of a will that would not be denied. Within a quarter of an hour all the heavy dalesmen were up and doing. An army of men, unaccustomed to turn aside, were soon in motion like a funeral procession, driving, walking, running south. Along the roads and at the gates the women stood anxiously watching.

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"Be careful!" they called to their men.

The night battle had begun.

The fire, which had worked its way tardily through the fir trees along the river, now with a great roar jumped the millstream and seized upon the spruce. It sputtered and crackled in the dry timber like distant gunshots; at intervals there came a sullen booming like that of a cannon, as some ancient fir tree was splintered or a boulder burst with the heat. And behind the fire followed queer smothered reverberations as the fallen timber smouldered, smoked, and fell to ashes. Now the fire had reached the tinder of spruce brush just above Blændvasströen. Hushchchch! the flames raced up the slope like a gathering storm; a sea of fire dashed against the heavens, grumbling an infernal laugh of triumph.

"Good Lord! It's drawing near the farms," wailed the women, standing terror-stricken at home. And at Blændvasströen an old hag stood staring up the slope, spitting and laughing, while her swarthy eyes sparkled, and her fingers, like the claws of a bird of prey, gripped the rags that hung about her shrunken hips. Meanwhile, in the curve of the road below Blændvasströen, the men of the parish were pressing on, a distinct black stream. The horses labored heavily under the harness, their mouths dripping with foam and their ears laid back. On the first wagon sat

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Flötär-Lars, devil-may-care. Farther back, Jo the Smith could be heard cursing and lashing his horse, while alongside the last cart trotted Long Jacob carrying a huge boathook on his shoulder.

At Bergslien, Sjulasper stood gazing out, all alone. He was lame, and in that field of action there was nothing for a cripple to do.

The work of saving the parish had begun. Up along Orbeck brook, where the woods were rather thin, the men from the western farms fought their way slowly but surely. Axes swung through the air, and trees crashed to earth, leaving a broad fire-break behind. And along the narrow road to the sæter the ranks of men stood close, waiting with branches, axes, and hooks the onset of the foe. If the fire once crossed at this point, the entire eastern section of the parish was doomed.

From the depths of the forest nearer the line of fire came sounds of calling and shouting from those trying to turn the direction of the advancing flames up the mountain side. Their efforts proved useless. The cries sounded nearer and nearer. Hot blasts drove in upon the advance guard, and a mighty roaring filled their ears. Men came running across the brook and up toward the road.

"What's this you're bringing us?" asked a man

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named Syver, drily; he had sat down to rest and remained seated.

"Oh, it's just Kari cooking coffee," answered Jo the Smith, laughing like a horse.

"Here it comes!" shouted Flötar-Lars far in among the trees. And it was coming, sure enough, a wide river of flame. Sparks filled the sky. Arms of flame rose aloft, fell again to lay hold of fresh fuel, retreated, and advanced once more. But now there was little to feed on; all the standing timber had been felled. The trees already aflame burned to their crowns—and fell. The fire seized on the underbrush and the dry wind-falls and began to crawl across the clearing. Half a hundred men threw themselves upon the foe like wild beasts. They rushed in and swung heavy branches like flails; they chopped with axes, hauled down burning limbs with hooks; shouting hoarsely they scattered the flaming timbers, while smoke rolled over them, and the dying fire sputtered and crackled and whistled.

A tongue of flame leaped to a dry spruce by the roadside.

"Long Jacob! Long Jacob!" shouted Flötar-Lars, plying his axe till the chips flew like hail.

Long Jacob rushed up with his heavy hook and fixed it in the trunk.

"Up hill with it!" Flötar-Lars yelled once more.

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Long Jacob took such a grip that the spruce cracked and swayed. A rain of sparks fell on the men below.

"Will you give up!" he bellowed in a rage.

At last the burning tree tilted and fell up hill.

"That'll do for you!" said Long Jacob, out of breath; and with his hand he quenched some smouldering embers on his jacket.

To men such as these the fire was compelled to surrender. At Orbeck it was soon beaten down. But farther up, above the brook, the fire jumped the stream, and began to eat its way crackling down the slope again. The brave fellows gave a simultaneous outcry, and then stood still, without a word. Now it seemed as if all of Östlien was doomed, and that meant that the farms would go too.

"This won't do!" said Syver, and was off in a moment. And the rest dashed after him down the declivity, over stock and stone. All of a sudden Syver stopped and shouted. Another took up the cry, another, and then all as one man.

At a point down near the houses a thin red finger rose toward the heavens, first at one place, then at another, and finally a whole row stretching far up the incline. The men at the eastern border of the parish were fighting fire with fire. To save their homes they were sacrificing their best timber. Soon a broad belt of flame stretched

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from the houses far up the slope, the proud pines burning in solemn grandeur, trunk and crown. The backfire drew toward the south, evenly and surely. But down the slope the holocaust poured on at a prodigious rate. Now only a few hundred yards separated the two lines. Suddenly the backfire mounted higher, drawn into the suction. Like a wild monster with a flaming mane it rushed on the enemy. Every last man in the entire forest stood quite still, gazing at the scene.

With a thunderous crash the opposing forces sprang at each other. The earth trembled, trees toppled over, and flames rolled over flames up into the skies. Then, almost without warning, it was as if a dark shadow swept across the valley, blotting out everything. Gray columns of smoke writhed upward. Half-burned trunks swayed and sank in a heap—a subdued murmur of wind wafted over the stricken hillsides with a dying fall of sound, whirled up jets of ashes, and passed on.

The valley was saved.

But over the upper slopes toward the mountain heights the march of desolation went forward. For eighteen mortal hours the battle continued in those fastnesses between men and the elements, a struggle for every acre of wood, for every inch of ground. Men dashed forward to carry on the fight—and then dashed back to save

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their own lives; some lay buried in brooks and morasses up to their necks while hot blasts rolled over them; great birds came flying out from the green forest straight into the fire, where they sank from sight; bears ran roaring through burning brush till the singed fur fell from their sides; hares jumped panic-stricken into the arms of those who fought the flames—the whole creation groaned and travailed together throughout that terrible night.

Down below in the burned woods some of the stoutest men formed a cordon about the smouldering heap. But any one who might have chanced to cast his eyes over the scene, from the western confines of the parish, would have seen the valley in an aspect unknown to him before.

* * *

It was the evening of the second day. On the bridge spanning the Rena river stood the sheriff, weary and worn. For twelve hours he had been in the woods; then the old man had been compelled to give up and go home. His entire stand of timber was consumed. He rested his arms on the railing and looked down into the water. And he felt a strange sensation of nausea creeping over him. As he stood there, some one came walking swiftly from the eastern bank. It was Lorens-Kari. When she saw him she hesitated,

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and then continued to walk up the incline of the bridge.

"Good evening," she said meekly, and was about to pass by.

The sheriff stepped directly in front of her. "Where are you bound?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, I was just going to have a talk with you," she responded, even more meekly.

"It was you who started the fire," he said, fixing his burning eyes upon her face.

"Yes, God help me, it happened that way!" she whined, picking up her apron, her eyes wandering. "People shouldn't cook coffee in the woods," she continued. "Lord a mercy! that such a thing should happen—and to the sheriff, too." She attempted a show of tears.

The sheriff laid his hands on her. "You're not going to wriggle out of this, Kari," he said harshly; "now you and I are going to settle up."

She broke angrily from his grasp, her smouldering eyes bent upon him. "I don't think I owe the sheriff anything—any longer," she answered. Then she passed swiftly by him, half running.

The sheriff started in pursuit, but stopped. "You'd better pray God to help you," he called, with a threatening fist stretched out after her.

"God might do well to have mercy on us all," came her last word, like a sigh borne on the wind. Lorens-Kari walked on swiftly, turning her head

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once or twice, climbed the fence at Lökkejordet—and disappeared in the forest. Having reached a point from which she could command a view, she stopped, turned, looked out over the valley, and laughed a hideous laugh. Then she groaned once again, coughed painfully, and plunged into the wilderness.

The following day every one in the parish knew that the fire had started from the kindling under Kari's coffee pot; and every one knew as well that it was spite work, revenge. That is why they call the fire to this day the "Kari-fire" or the "Coffee-fire;" and in the annals of the parish she who kindled it goes by the nickname of Coffee-Kari.

When the sheriff sent out deputies to bring her into court, she had disappeared, and no one ever discovered where she had gone.

To be sure, some eight years later, people living on the steeps of Dovre came across a cadaver that had been gnawed by the fangs of wolves; but whether it was she or some other poor devil that the mountains had taken pity on, nobody knew.

KNUT HAMSUN

THE CALL OF LIFE

THE RING

KNUT HAMSDUN (1859-) was born in Gudbrandsdalen, but spent his childhood and early youth in Nordland. He received hardly any systematic education, but as a herdsboy in the summer he was allowed to dream his dreams and revel in the fantastically beautiful natural environs which later inspired many passages in his books. After vainly trying to make his fortune in the United States, he came back to Norway. A few unhappy months in Oslo vainly seeking work resulted in his masterpiece *Hunger* (1890) which made him instantly famous in the Scandinavian countries. In this book, as in the novels *Mysteries* and *Pan*, the love idyl *Victoria*, and the dramatic poem *Munken Vendt*, there is a hero who is a variation of the same type, romantic, wayward, at once generous and egotistical, an outsider from organized society. This hero reappears later in *Wanderers* and *The Last Joy*, but now older and as an observer rather than an actor in life. The novels *Benoni*, *Rosa*, and *Segelfoss Town*, all with a Nordland background, are not so much stories of individuals as broad paintings of whole communities, in which Hamsun has given free play to his humor and his power of drastic characterization. From these he passed to the book that stands as the peak of his creative work, *Growth of the Soil* (1917) in which he takes a primitive individual and sets him in the midst of unspoiled, "friendly" nature. It was an apotheosis of productiveness and as such roused the more enthusiasm all over the world because it came during the years of the war. It was recognized by the conferring upon Hamsun of the Nobel Prize.

Hamsun's fame rests chiefly upon his fiction, but he has also written several dramas as well as a volume of poems, *The Wild Chorus*, of great lyric beauty.

Knut Hamsun

THE CALL OF LIFE

DOWN near the inner harbor in Copenhagen there is a street called Vestervold, a relatively new, yet desolate, boulevard. There are few houses to be seen on it, few gas lamps, and almost no people whatever. Even now, in summer, it is rare that one sees people promenading there.

Well, last evening I had something of a surprise in that street.

I had taken a few turns up and down the sidewalk when a lady came towards me from the opposite direction. There were no other people in sight. The gas lamps were lighted, but it was nevertheless dark—so dark that I could not distinguish the lady's face. One of the usual creatures of the night, I thought to myself, and passed her by.

At the end of the boulevard I turned about and walked back. The lady had also turned about, and I met her again. She is waiting for some one, I thought, and I was curious to see whom she could be waiting for. And again I passed her by.

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When I met her the third time I tipped my hat and spoke to her.

"Good evening! Are you waiting for some one?"

She was startled. No—that is, yes—she was waiting for some one.

Did she object to my keeping her company till the person she was expecting arrived?

No—she did not object in the least, and she thanked me. For that matter, she explained, she was not expecting any one. She was merely taking the air—it was so still here.

We strolled about side by side. We began talking about various things of no great consequence. I offered my arm.

"Thank you, no," she said, and shook her head.

There was no great fun promenading in this way; I could not see her in the dark. I struck a match to see what time it was. I held the match up and looked at her too.

"Nine-thirty," I said.

She shivered as if she were freezing. I seized the opportunity.

"You are freezing?" I asked. "Shan't we drop in some place and get something to drink? At Tivoli? At the National?"

"But, don't you see, I can't go anywhere now," she answered.

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And I noticed then for the first time that she wore a very long black veil.

I begged her pardon, and blamed the darkness for my mistake. And the way in which she took my apology at once convinced me that she was not one of the usual night wanderers.

"Won't you take my arm?" I suggested again. "It may warm you a bit."

She took my arm.

We paced up and down a few turns. She asked me to look at the time again.

"It is ten," I said. "Where do you live?"

"On Gamle Kongevei."

I stopped her.

"And may I see you to your door?" I asked.

"Not very well," she answered. "No, I can't let you . . . You live on Bredgade, don't you?"

"How do you know that?" I asked surprised.

"Oh, I know who you are," she answered.

A pause. We walked arm in arm down the lighted streets. She walked rapidly, her long veil streaming behind.

"We had better hurry," she said.

At her door in Gamle Kongevei she turned toward me as if to thank me for my kindness in escorting her. I opened the door for her, and she entered slowly. I thrust my shoulder gently against the door and followed her in. Once in-

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side she seized my hand. Neither of us said anything.

We mounted two flights of stairs and stopped on the third floor. She herself unlocked the door to her apartment, then opened a second door, and took me by the hand and led me in. It was presumably a drawing-room; I could hear a clock ticking on the wall. Once inside the door the lady paused a moment, threw her arms about me suddenly, and kissed me tremblingly, passionately, on the mouth. Right on the mouth.

"Won't you be seated," she suggested. "Here is a sofa. Meanwhile I'll get a light."

And she lit a lamp.

I looked about me, amazed, yet curious. I found myself in a spacious and extremely well furnished drawing-room with other, half open, doors leading into several rooms on the side. I could not for the life of me make out what sort of person it was I had come across.

"What a beautiful room!" I exclaimed. "Do you live here?"

"Yes, this is my home," she answered.

"Is this your home? You live with your parents then?"

"Oh, no," she laughed. "I am an old woman, as you'll see!"

And she removed her veil and her wraps.

"There—see! What did I tell you!" she

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said, and threw her arms about me once again, abruptly, driven by some uncontrollable urge.

She might have been twenty-two or three, wore a ring on her right hand, and might for that matter really have been a married woman. Beautiful? No, she was freckled, and had scarcely any eyebrows. But there was an effervescent life about her, and her mouth was strangely beautiful.

I wanted to ask her who she was, where her husband was, if she had any, and whose house this was I was in, but she threw herself about me every time I opened my mouth and forbade me to be inquisitive.

"My name is Ellen," she explained. "Would you care for something to drink? It really won't disturb any one if I ring. Perhaps you'd step in here, in the bed-room, meanwhile."

I went into the bed-room. The light from the drawing room illumined it partially. I saw two beds. Ellen rang and ordered wine, and I heard a maid bring in the wine and go out again. A little later Ellen came into the bed-room after me, but she stopped short in the door. I took a step towards her. She uttered a little cry and at the same time came towards me.

This was last evening.

What further happened? Ah, patience! There is much more!

It was beginning to grow light this morning

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when I awoke. The daylight crept into the room on either side of the curtain. Ellen was also awake and smiled toward me. Her arms were white and velvety, her breast unusually high. I whispered something to her, and she closed my mouth with hers, mute with tenderness. The day grew lighter and lighter.

Two hours later I was on my feet. Ellen was also up, busy dressing herself—she had got her shoes on. Then it was I experienced something which even now strikes me as a gruesome dream. I was at the wash stand. Ellen had some errand or other in the adjoining room, and as she opened the door I turned around and glanced in. A cold draft from the open windows in the room rushed in upon me, and in the center of the room I could just make out a corpse stretched out on a table. A corpse, in a coffin, dressed in white, with a gray beard, the corpse of a man. His bony knees protruded like madly clenched fists underneath the sheet, and his face was sallow and ghastly in the extreme. I could see everything in full daylight. I turned away and said not a word.

When Ellen returned I was dressed and ready to go out. I could scarcely bring myself to respond to her embraces. She put on some additional clothes; she wanted to accompany me down as far as the street door, and I let her come, still

Knut Hamsun

saying nothing. At the door she pressed close to the wall so as not to be seen.

"Well, good-bye," she whispered.

"Till to-morrow?" I asked, in part to test her.

"No, not to-morrow."

"Why not to-morrow?"

"Not so many questions, dear. I am going to a funeral to-morrow, a relation of mine is dead. Now there—you know it."

"But the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, the day after to-morrow, at the door here, I'll meet you. Good-bye!"

I went.

Who was she? And the corpse? With its fists clenched and the corners of its mouth drooping—how ghastly comic! The day after to-morrow she would be expecting me. Ought I to see her again?

I went straight down to the Bernina Café and asked for a directory. I looked up number so and so Gamle Kongevei, and—there—there was the name. I waited some little time till the morning papers were out. Then I turned quickly to the announcements of deaths. And—sure enough—there I found hers too, the very first in the list, in bold type: "My husband, fifty-three years old, died to-day after a long illness." The announcement was dated the day before yesterday.

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I sat for a long time and pondered.

A man marries. His wife is thirty years younger than he. He contracts a lingering illness. One fair day he dies.

And the young widow breathes a sigh of relief.

THE RING

I ONCE at a party saw a young lady madly in love. There was a double blue and a double sparkle in her eyes, and she was totally unable to conceal her feelings. Whom did she love? The young gentleman over by the window, the son of the host, a man with a uniform and a lion's voice. And oh! how her eyes feasted on the young man, and how restless she sat in her chair.

"What marvelous weather this is!" I remarked, as we went home that night, for I knew her well. "Did you enjoy yourself this evening?"

And in order to anticipate her wish I removed the engagement ring from my finger.

"Do you know," I said to her, "this ring you gave me has grown too small, too tight, for my finger. Do you suppose you could have it made larger?"

She reached out her hand.

"Let me take it, and I'll soon have it made larger."

And I gave her the ring.

A month later I met her again. I wanted to ask her about the ring, but on second thought decided not to. There is no hurry as yet, I said to

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myself, let her have a little more time—a month is too short.

Then she looked down at the pavement.

“Oh yes,—the ring,” she said. “This ring is ill-fated, I’m afraid,—I’ve mislaid it somewhere, I’ve lost it.”

And she waited for my answer.

“Are you angry with me?” she asked uneasily.

“No,” I answered.

And oh! how relieved she went away when she discovered that I wasn’t angry with her!

A whole year went by. I was once more among the old well-known places, and strolled one evening down a familiar, familiar path.

Then I saw her coming towards me. There was a treble blue and a treble sparkle in her eyes, but her mouth had grown large and pale.

“Here is your ring—your engagement ring,” she called to me, still far off. “I’ve found it again, my beloved, and I’ve had it made larger. It will never again be too tight for you.”

I looked at the forlorn woman and at her large pale mouth. And I looked at the ring.

“Alas!” I said, as I bowed very low, “this ring is certainly ill-fated! It is now altogether too large.”

THOMAS KRAG

JÖRGEN DAM, PHILOLOGIST

THOMAS KRAG (1868-1913) represents the reaction of the nineties against the preoccupation with sociological problems that characterized the eighties of the last century. A native of southern Norway, a member of an old patrician family, his romanticism is deeply tinged by the environs of his early home. The fine old mansions with wide parks still to be seen in that part of the country reappear in his novels, in forms statelier perhaps than the reality, as the background of characters who have in their blood the heritage of violent passions. Often he traces the decay of old families. The atmosphere of mystery and romance is enhanced by a style saturated with color.

Among the most important of Thomas Krag's novels are generally mentioned *Ada Wilde*, *Ulf Ran*, and *Gunvor Kjeld*. *Jörgen Dam* is an instance of that longing for beauty and romance, for ampler living and more thrilling experiences, which is often expressed in his books.

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JÖRGEN DAM, PHILOLOGIST

THE summer I met Jörgen Dam his beard had a peculiar color—I can not now say for certain whether it was yellow or gray. He was of the type of blond people who turn gray quite imperceptibly. He looked, on the whole, very unprepossessing, and he seemed worn thin and threadbare besides. The latter perhaps largely because there were always buttons lacking in his coat, and because he was habitually careless about his trousers—so careless that they were often just on the point of falling off.

He used to drop in frequently to see me and smoke a pipe of my strong tobacco. He was very fond of this tobacco, and used to insist that it tasted of tea, something that I for my part never could see. I can still picture him as he used to thank me for the match I lit and handed him. "Hm, thanks! many thanks! I could light it myself." And then he would look up at me suspiciously—as though he wanted to assure himself that my proffer of service was meant seriously.

Jörgen Dam was a master in a boys' school, and one of those meticulously courteous souls

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about whom it may be almost certainly predicated that they are unhappy. Perhaps the boys at school plagued him, and perhaps this affected his behavior in general. Certain it is that his undue civility almost embarrassed me—he was after all the older and I the younger. He was always saying, “May I venture to ask your opinion? Yes, to be sure . . . I dare say you’re right. Hm, I had, I confess, thought that—that—but, as I say, you’re no doubt right.”

It was a dreary summer we had that year. It may be that the sun shone warm in other places; but in the coast town where we were living it was rarely seen. The sky was gray day in and day out, and lead-like the waves rolled in from the sea.

Yet after long weeks our turn came one morning. The clouds had dispersed, and the sun hung fair and warm in the sky. The strangest of all was that it warmed us as much as it did. For it was a day in the aftermath of summer—on the twilight side of the year. Still that did not detract from it, but rather cast over it a strange sadness—a sadness we associate with decline and decay.

* * *

“I say—we do not know our neighbors! I beg your pardon, that is a banal observation. But I find myself often repeating it. As now when the

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theme is myself! I am certain you think I am Jörgen Dam, just plain simple Jörgen Dam, master of boys. You regard me indeed as a kind of human harmony. You imagine my soul wholly contented and at peace. You think my greatest concern is seeing that a handful of youngsters be informed as to when Christopher of Bayern was crowned, or in what epoch-making year it was that Cicero delivered his oration in behalf of the poet Archias. And you imagine further that I admire the 'dux' of the class for his application and after him the next best for his ability to remember all manner of names. Ah, let me tell you, I have—I have also been studious; I have also been 'dux.' But, good Lord! how little human enjoyment I have had out of life! Ah, *one* there is I do admire, a devil of a youngster, given to reading beneath his desk and to writing props in the margin—a spirited handsome fellow, with no interest in his studies, but with a great deal of *mutterwitz*, if you know what I mean. Well, believe it or not, I—yes, I—admire that fellow—envy him—perhaps even hate him. The lazy rascal will make his way some day; he is merely biding his time; he will some day stand face to face with pulsating life; he will seize the golden opportunities as they come. And he will enjoy life's luxuries—which I have been denied.

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Fair ladies will kiss his beautiful eyes and run their lily-white hands through his soft hair."

Jörgen Dam blushed suddenly and became embarrassed—he had never talked so much at one time and never had betrayed himself.

I laughed. "You're right; we do not know our neighbors! I had certainly never dreamed that you were anything but a philologist."

"Philologist? Philologist! What do you imply by that intonation? I suppose you think there are all manner of freaks in that profession—dried up old fogies with dull eyes! Ah, believe me, these philologists are as a rule worthy people—individuals who are crushing some great longing or other as they plod their way unnoticed. And remember one thing: philologists are interested in the history of all ages. They learn to admire men—lords who rule, heroes who act. They know the literature of all ages and art and culture in general; the surging odes of Horace, the blasé dandy; the extravagant *Amores* of Ovid, lover of his emperor's daughter. Ah, believe me, many a staid philologist, who daily exhorts his boys to virtue, yearns in his heart to step out as a pagan, a handsome naked barbarian, who looks on the stars and the sun as brothers."

We were sitting for the moment—Jörgen Dam and I—on the little veranda of the house. The sun had gone down, and the last cloud was fad-

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ing in the west. No one disturbed us, and he continued slowly and in a muffled voice.

"On my wanderings through the ages I have had many a love affair—many an infatuation. For a long time I was passionately in love with Nausicaä—that I count one of my fortunate ventures. Nausicaä returned, as it were, my affections—she was never a coquette; she always had about her an aroma of violets and fresh earth. But then I have had other, deeper, more absorbing, violent infatuations. Juliet, Lucrezia Borgia, and Cleopatra—Yes, you may laugh, you needn't be afraid—Jörgen Dam, the humble master, who smokes mild tobacco, and Queen Cleopatra, the sovereign of many sovereigns—a handsome couple, eh?

"Well, in my many infatuations with these ravishing women I have been very unhappy, wretched, miserable."

"But, God a'mercy!" I exclaimed, "Are you philologists as wretched as all that?"

"Not all, but many. I have a friend who now and then develops a case on Lord Byron; and then he is mighty proud, I can tell you. Another has lavished his love on Napoleon. When he gets drunk he invariably says, 'I feel myself akin to thee, great Cæsar, who sat on the desolate isle like an eagle with crippled wings'."

I laughed, "Crippled wings?"

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"Yes, that's what he says—'crippled wings.' The whole thing is nothing but nonsense, of course."

"But candidly speaking," I remarked after a pause, "such fancies I always thought people got rid of in high school. Ah, it is this stuff from abroad that is slowly unstringing our nerves. If we could only once come to see that we, too, have something of the ideal. . . . But listen, have you never been in love with some real human being? Remember, your darling Juliet, your golden haired Lucrezia, your insatiate Cleopatra are dust and ashes! Have you never met any one who made it unnecessary for you to go back so far into history and above all unnecessary for you to dream all this?"

"Oh—I hardly know what to say. After all, I think it best for me to keep to the historic—the world-historic!"

Jörgen Dam laughed so strangely that I had to look at him. He sat for the moment with eyes cast down, as though he were ashamed.

"So you'd rather not tell me about it?" I asked. "Oh, well, that's no more than natural. People in the long run prefer to live with their curtains drawn."

"Exactly. You're quite right! Every man should be entitled to live, as you say, with his curtains drawn. But I could really tell you some-

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thing you might be interested in. The incident has indeed, if I may say so, a psychological element, and you're interested, I'm sure, in the psychological. . . . Besides one has to unburden himself some time—even though it be painful.

“Well, let me tell you, a few years ago I became tutor in a family, a very well-to-do family that lived much to itself and scorned its immediate neighbors, a shopkeeper, a bailiff, and some farmers. The two sons, whom I had to tutor, were lazy and untrustworthy, but very active, very assertive. Indeed, the whole family was not without self-sufficiency and egotism, which made my stay there not altogether pleasant. But—imagine—I fell passionately in love with the daughter. A rather silly infatuation, but terrible none the less. It has made me what I am. You have noticed, I am sure, that I have no great illusions about myself. This infatuation was—I may say—love at first sight. Ah, what a life! It dazzled my eyes! Her name was Ursula. She had a mass of yellow, slightly curly hair, and one of those pale faces which testify to strength and vitality beneath their pallor. Indeed, even now, when I think of her, it all comes back to me—I seem to see some unknown thing of beauty before my eyes. As regards her, she was quite friendly towards me, nothing more. She liked to be considered modern. She had twice visited Copen-

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hagen to see the sights, and she told me much about the life there. I have myself, you see, never managed to get beyond our own capital. Well, as I say, I noticed nothing that would indicate that she was in any way interested in me, and you can therefore readily understand that when the thing happened which I am now recounting it took me quite by surprise and made me almost apprehensive.

“She became ill. She went about with ne’er a word. At length she had to take to her bed. The doctor, an old half-blind district physician, made many a diagnosis, but scarcely the right one. Still in due time she got up and seemed better; but one morning a week or so later she had a relapse. A very serious relapse. That same evening her family decided to send her the very next day to the capital to consult with one of the professors in the university.

“Then came the ‘miracle’—a sublime word, if it is taken in its proper sense.

“Early that morning, you see, I was awakened by the maid: Miss Ursula wanted to speak with me. I didn’t at all understand, but nevertheless I dressed myself hurriedly, groped my way to her chamber, and entered, half-dark as it was. It was in October, and not much past seven o’clock. There lay the young lady in her bed, her hand stretched out towards me, as though she’d been

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waiting for me. She was beautiful—ah, beautiful indeed! Her features were exquisite, drawn as it were with a single delicate, shadowy line as in old portraits. I went over to her bed.

“ ‘Miss Ursula,’ I said, ‘you want to see me?’ ”

“ ‘Tell me!’ she whispered, ‘that you have loved me!’ ”

“ ‘Miss Ursula, what do you mean?’ ”

“ ‘Yes, you have—you have. I have seen it plainly.’ ”

“ ‘Miss Ursula,’ I said, strangely moved, as I knelt at the bedside, ‘Yes, yes, I have always loved you.’ ”

“She looked straight ahead and smiled.

“ ‘Miss Ursula,’ I whispered, ‘is it possible—do you really care for me?’ ”

“She threw her arms about me and pressed my head to her bosom.

“ ‘Yes,’ she whispered as in ecstasy, ‘I do love you. You! You! Kiss me!’ ”

“Well, it’s no use trying to describe such things. I was drunk, half-crazy, when I departed from her chamber. And when later in the day she drove off in the carriage our eyes sought each other, her anxious look penetrating deep into mine. Indeed, she sought me more than she did her parents.

“She wrote letters home—to her parents and to me. But those to me were addressed in a

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strange hand, as though she dared not let her parents know that she wrote to me. Well—in short, the first letters I received told of her lonesome life, of death, which she had now become reconciled to in a way. And then of course of her love. She did love me, she wrote—truly, truly! she added always. To reassure me, you understand.

"My letters to her did not contain assurances, but I have never written such letters before or since. God knows where the words came from; but they came, without show, without tinsel. I could even feel the words vibrate."

Jörgen Dam paused a moment as if in thought.

"Then came spring," he resumed, "and she grew better, really better. The doctor wrote to her parents and informed them that all danger was over. She might come home by summer—in June or July.

"Her letters to her parents grew more frequent now, and those to me less frequent. The few that came told me of her joy; death was far behind her now; before her lay life—life and summer.

"She never asked me how I was.

"Perhaps you begin to see what I then saw.

"She came home more beautiful than ever. Somehow I couldn't quite welcome her. She had become once more a stranger to me; she had be-

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come again what she was when I saw her for the first time. And, indeed, that is not strange. You remember how I had last seen her—ill and distressed—and she—hm—she seemed not to remember much. Oh, she remembered no doubt, but she was apparently anxious not to remember.

“June does not care to think of October.

“Well—I did what was right. I had a talk with her one evening. She answered my questions, seemed for a moment to drift back into recollections of the past, and put on the expression I remembered from that strange autumn morning. But she shook herself out of it.

“ ‘Goodness,’ she said, ‘at that time I thought I cared for you, and I wanted you to love me. I was so young. I was afraid to die.’

“ ‘You were afraid to die before some one had loved you.’

“She looked at me in surprise.

“ ‘But now,’ I continued, ‘you need fear no longer.’

“ ‘No!’ she exclaimed suddenly, her eyes glistening, her features transfigured with joy. ‘No, now I need fear no longer. Ah, it is wonderful to get away from all that darkness. Ugh! I shall never, never want to see it again, even though at that time I did not think it so terrible.’

“ ‘Well, Miss Ursula, I have been of some help

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in a dreary hour—perhaps you will now and then remember me.’

“ ‘Ah, you were so kind! I’m sure it’s not nice of me; that I am as I am. Are you dreadfully disappointed?’

“ ‘Disappointed?’ I laughed. ‘What shall I answer? Disappointed! Oh, I understand you well enough. Farewell, Miss!’

“She gave me her hand.

“ ‘Farewell!’

“I don’t remember these moments so very clearly. It seemed as if all light had left me. Suddenly I pulled myself together. ‘Remember, Miss Ursula! in case you ever need help another time, use this method only in the direst need!’ I said slowly.

* * *

“You will now understand perhaps why I have retired within myself, why I am so careless about my clothes, and why I let my beard grow and look like some old Moses. I have entrenched myself. I will have peace. To suffer day after day is bad enough, but to waken in the night and be unable to sleep because of thought—that is still worse.

“No, now I study Italian and modern Greek in my spare hours, and by way of a change take an occasional jaunt with a colleague or two. And

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at school I lead my boys on short parasangs, through the desolate stretches of Asia Minor, where once in a while you get dates to eat that are amber colored and palm wine to drink that produces headaches.

"The oldest of the old days! I like to dream of them! Some day our own age, too, will be very old, and we shall be here no longer. We shall no longer suffer, and no one will ask about our joys and our sorrows.

"Before long autumn will come! Then I shall venture forth and take my jaunts with nature as she slowly dies. There is a brooding melancholy about nature in autumn, and she is never afraid to acknowledge her heavy sorrows. The October sun she suffers to shine! She adorns herself with yellow leaves! The wild winds she suffers to blow and the dank mists to settle!—ah, she is all purple and red, purple and red. And all this—all this colorful wild melancholy—I press to my bosom as a mistress——"

I continued to sit and stare amazed at Jörgen Dam, teacher of boys. He was for a moment some one else—who or what, it was not easy to say. But then he returned; his features and expressions became as of old, self-conscious.

"Good Heavens!" he said, I almost believe I grew grandiloquent towards the last. But it's too late to retract now. I fancy it really is late,

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isn't it? What do you say—shall we go in? It's after ten o'clock."

HANS E. KINCK

NOCTURNE

MARIN UNION
JUNIOR COLLEGE

HANS E. KINCK (1865-1926) was born in Finmarken as the son of a district physician. The most impressionable years of his childhood were spent in Setesdalen, an interior valley of southern Norway where the people have retained not only their ancient folk costumes and ways of living, but also a strain of medieval savagery. It was from this region, or from Hardanger to which his parents afterwards removed, that Kinck drew his peasant types. It has been claimed by competent critics that no other contemporary writer has had the keen insight into Norwegian psychology that Kinck had. It was his theory that the present could be understood only by tracing the delicate root filaments by which the living generation is connected with its remote ancestors, and he was not only a creative writer, but also a scholar. He has brought both his research and his poetic art to bear preferably on decadent individual types and on crumbling civilizations, as offering the most interesting topics for study. The Norwegian peasants he saw as possessed of a certain indigenous culture which was crumbling under the impact of a superficial city civilization imposed from the outside. This conflict is the subject of his novels *A Young People*, *Emigrants*, and *The Snowslide Fell*. In the dramatic poem *The Drover* he tried to fuse the varying elements in the Norwegian character—"the horse-trader and the poet."

Parallel with Kinck's books on Norwegian subjects are his poems, dramas, and critical works on Italian life and culture, among them the dramas *Carnival*, in which Machiavelli is the chief character, *The Last Guest*, *Wedding at Genoa*, and *Lisabetta's Brothers*.

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NOCTURNE

A GRAY night late in the summer many, many years ago. A man sits in a little tar-caulked four-oar boat, rowing out the fjord against the wind. A bareheaded, shabby sort of fellow, with a little chin beard and farther up a frame of hair around the smoothshaven face, whose mouth slavers at one corner from a brown quid, and with little, blinking, pale-blue eyes. A saltwater fellow. Probably a boat builder boarding with a peasant, or something similar. A barrel lies in the after bulkhead, concealed by mast and sail. It is full of blanquettes. There has been no such abundance of these pears any year in the memory of people who live by the fjord. Blanquettes don't improve by lying on the ground, for they rot so soon, and it is best to gather them just before they turn yellow, which is exactly what he has done.

Somewhere in the neighborhood stands a fine old tree. Its trunk divides into two branches right down by the root, and it is so richly laden this year that the whole tree bows down, each branch in its own direction, and every day it

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gently splits a little more in the cleft between the branches, with a cracking of the bark and a gleaming through of white wood. So he has been harvesting two nights in succession, carrying sacks full down through the orchard to the boathouse and cautiously emptying the fruit into his barrel. Now on the third night he warily transfers the barrel to his four-oar boat, spreads the sail over it—unfastening it somewhat from the mast to make it reach farther—and shoves off. Of course it is necessary to do all this quietly. But even if it happens that the tree doesn't exactly stand on his land, what great difference can there be in a year when fruit is so plentiful! Nine miles farther out the fjord there is a stopping place beyond this one, which the boat bound for town reaches in the small hours of the morning. He may know one of the sailors. As far as this he will have to row with the pears to-night.

But it blows, and it howls. This time the day's sea breeze did not die down toward evening. Rather it has blown up a little stronger during the night, and veered round to the west too. This is more than ordinarily overcast weather—wind from the ocean! This is the ocean's wet, fog-laden wind. Rain is on the way.

Slowly and persistently the four-oar boat plods seaward, lifting and falling on the gray waves raised by the west wind. When the crest of one

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rears up too proudly, the stem smashes it all to white foam. One lone man rowing against the night and the weather. He works his way on along the land, and his blue eyes gaze calmly aft at the gray mass of stone he is leaving. His body bends forward and leans backward, as regularly as his breathing, the oars darting out to dip in long strokes while his freckled fists follow without a pause, firm as claws about the grips. The wind is even and steady, with hardly a gust. On all sides there is a rushing of waves, and about the headlands there is a breaking and crashing sea as they end their journey against the hard soil of Norway itself. House after house passes aft. Closed doors. People inside, sleeping the heavy dreamless sleep of a rainy night. Little boat-houses on the beach. Four-oar boats lying on their sides at landing-places appear and are lost to view. You might think a whale was puffing forward—such a racket swoops down on the boat with the wind. A sloop is following aft in a series of tacks, lying low in the water. Seems to him he ought to know it. . . . He stays in close to the seaweed, and takes refuge in little inlets, any kind of a bend that affords a bit of shelter, working close up to crags which crush the waves to tractable foamy ripples for his boat. The blade of the landward oar scrapes bottom now and again. The white masses of rock gleam

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into the gray air. In between them rusty-green, lush grass growing right up to the wall of a house. Near one corner of it an ancient apple tree—the night breeze makes it turn out the silver shining sides of its leaves. There a newly washed Sunday shirt flaps giddily in the gray night. At a little tenant farm the indispensable big earthenware vessel smoulders yellow-brown and kindly through the dark. It is leaning up against the wall of the house, since it is summer and one can just as easily go out of doors as not. There a fleasome winter bedcover of fur flutters from its pole out on the hillside, still enjoying a summer vacation, even as the hospitable earthen vessel. All the tenant farms and points of land come to view and then vanish . . . Hatlaness . . . Oldervik . . . Asketang . . . Gygrastolshamar . . . Otrestein. Distance is being covered by the strokes of these oars, regular as your breathing. As soon as he rows close up to Otrestein he'll set sail, for from here you can get across the fjord to the boat landing. There is a good rough sea out there. Yes, the fjord is kicking up pretty well.

Here in Otrevaa the rocky walls cast a dark shadow, and the water is calm. Right by Otrestein he draws in his oars, lifts the sail from the bulkhead, and slips the mast through the hole in the forward thwart, unfolds it, scrambles forward

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with the foresail, setting its sheet in place, raises the sprit, pulls out the mainsail sheet, and draws it behind the cleat, winding it tight. A white new patch gleams high up near the mast. He'll have to row a little beneath the sail until he gets free of these troublesome back eddies of wind in by the crags. The mainsail flaps softly, and the foresail lies back, but he rows.

A white seamew flutters above an animal over on the stone which lies devouring something that wriggles and beats the air with its tail. That's odd! He must have been in the Otrevaag man's salmon net, stealing. And the Otrevaag man has no idea that the otter is like that—going into your salmon net. And no doubt a fox is lurking about the beach here, on the lookout for fish. The otter drops the fish—probably scared by the boat. It glitters, silvery in the dark. And the fox gets it! He's probably not so shy as the otter, or perhaps the other is already full.

"Ho!" he yells. "Drop it, you thief!"

Now he has caught the wind. He draws in the oars, keeping one in his fist to steer with. The four-oar boat heels over. "Caw-caw!" says the mainsail with a sound like the cry of a crow. There is a purling and a gurgling from the hollow streak that follows his oar. "Caw-caw!" He lets out the sheet a little to ease things and then grabs it fast, fairly hanging on to steady it until

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the boat gets well under way and the wind stops taking it out of the sail so. Yes, he ought to have set a patch in its lower corner too. He cautiously pulls the sheet in again, tentatively. "Caw-caw!" Lets it out again a little to save the sail. Meanwhile he smiles to himself at the thought of the animals. "Hawk beats hawk" he has heard as an old proverb, but never "Fox beats otter." Yes, indeed, there can be funny goings on when it's a question of getting your livelihood, you know. . .

Here comes the sloop plunging ahead, sweeping the water before it, lying so erect and steady in the waves, but heavily laden, right down to the bulwarks. It is Mikjel Tuften's stone-carrying sloop from farther in the fjord. A head is visible, as he sits dozing behind the leaky blue-painted bulwark. That fellow Mikjel often travels alone. Now she is taking a new tack right here under Otrestein. But she is reluctant in coming about, loaded down as she is.

"Caw-caw!" . . . How will he ever get across the fjord with such a sail! . . . And he bears down on the sloop, clattering up against it just as the man on board is ready with the sails, and addresses the flame red head behind the bulwark—a short neck connects it with ponderous shoulders that stoop over, giving the effect of an angry,

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snarling poodle, thick and bristling around the neck.

"Want to buy some blanquettes, Mikjel?" he says, and casts a line about the after shroud.

"How many?"

"A barrel."

"What'll you take?"

"Seven ort."

"Come along with it!"

The barrel is pulled aboard. He hands over one daler. But immediately he casts the four-oar's line loose.

"Have you been in the doctor's garden?"

The man in the boat gets up boiling with rage. "What the devil . . ."

The man on the sloop is yelping at him like a dog. "Then why do you come rowing out here in such weather?"

"Six and a half!" he shouts, reaching out his hand. No answer from behind the bulwark. "Six!" he shouts at that. "Five and a half!" No answer. And the man in the boat drops down on the thwart and rows beneath the sail with quick, splashing strokes. But the head back of the bulwark glides away from him and stands fiery red against the light gray curtain of rain, which is moving out the valley to the south somewhere.

"Give me the empty barrel back anyway!" he screams.

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For it is an impossibility for a four-oar boat to overtake even such an excuse for a sloop when it has once got a start. She lumbers spluttering and purling off into the foggy night, like a drenched he-bear. "Caw-caw!" He puts down the steering oar and puts about abruptly. On the way back he runs down wind with mainsail ballooning out—now it is not so hard on the rotten cloth—flying like a goosander over the dancing tops of the waves. A bareheaded shabby sort of fellow with a pale, dead-tired gleam in his eye as he calls to mind the fox and the otter. Yes indeed, there can be funny goings on, you know, when it is a question of getting hold of a little bit of cash! . . . He is gone in the rainy gray late summer night.

The wind and storm continue. These are not clouds swarming along. Only a tranquil, damp, rainy mist that works its way in close to both rocky sides of the fjord. Clinging tight, it fills all the dales, follows the land closely, in the inlets and out at the points, sinks down over the hill-sides, reaches the pine woods, settles over peoples' houses, bringing darkness. And the rusty-green breaks between the crags grow almost black, as the pine wood was, with shadow and night. Now the blanket of mist has gotten down to the beach and hides all the fjord's houses with the saltwater people who sleep inside without

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dreaming. Look out, there was the first drop!
No sir, now it won't be long in coming. . .

HANS AANRUD
WHEN THE FROST COMES

HANS AANRUD (1863-) was born on the gaard Aanrud in Gausdal, Gudbrandsdalen. In his boyhood, when he herded cattle or worked on his father's farm, he gained the intimate knowledge of nature and people in his native valley which gives such an air of truthfulness to his stories. He was not allowed to stay on the farm, however. His gifts were discovered; he was sent away to school, and went so far as to matriculate at the university, but his tastes were for literature and the theatre rather than scholarship. Aanrud's position as one of the foremost writers of peasant stories is well established in Norway. His style is well demonstrated by the story *When the Frost Comes* included in this volume. It has the fresh crispness in nature description and the homely charm of folk life which are characteristic of him. The subject is one familiar to Norwegian literature: the tiny, almost imperceptible rift which threatens to become a permanent breach between friends; but Aanrud's humor and his faith in human nature turn a possible tragedy into an idyl. Among his most popular books are the stories for children *Sidsel Sidsærk* (translated as *Lisbeth Longfrock*) and *Sölve Solfeng*, both based on his own recollections. Aanrud has also written several popular comedies.

Hans Aanrud

WHEN THE FROST COMES

THE long hoarse cry of a fox rang up towards Melbö from the Longmoors.

"Bow-wow-wow-ow!"

Burman shot out from the hearth and sent the ashes flying, made straight for the door, ran his head against it, and let out a yelp.

"Bow-wow-wow-ow!"

"Sh, Burman!"

Simen Melbö awoke and turned so sharply about that the bed squeaked.

"Bow-wow-ow!"

"Sh, Burman, be still!"

At that Berte, too, awoke.

"For heaven's sake, what's amiss now that Burman barks so in here?"

"He's heard something, I suppose."

"Bow-ow!"

"Then hurry and let him out! What if it were gypsies!"

Simen got out of bed and opened the door. Burman shot out barking, headed for his usual place on the knoll outside the windows, crouched down, and began in deep tones, first to howl

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wildly, then little by little to settle down to a slow steady harmless baying, which echoed out over the valley in the still, starlit autumn morning.

Simen had by now become wide awake and peered out through the window. It was getting on towards morning apparently. The stars had already begun to pale, and the objects nearest at hand loomed up in the gray haze. But as far as the Longmoor he could not penetrate; the dale bottom still lay in darkness,—or was it fog!

“Is it clear?” Berte asked.

“The sky is clear, but I can’t tell whether it’s foggy or not.”

“Will it clear up towards morning?”

Simen took one more look, his head askew, up through the window.

“It seems almost likely to,” he answered satisfied, rubbed his sides, and went over and crept beneath the sheepskin again.

“I wonder how my calves are getting on now,” Berte sighed heavily after a bit.

“Oh, they should be in clover,—now that they’re guests, as it were, of the bailiff.”

“It was really too bad this affair had to come between you and Ola Nerbö!”

“Well, why is he always causing me so much trouble?”

“If only he doesn’t start suit!”

“Let him start suit if he wants to,—that takes

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money. I'll follow him to the highest court, and Ola'll be broke before he gets that far. And now his crop down on the Longmoor is freezing on him; he shan't burn one single green twig on my property either."

They were silent. Simen continued to lie and think. He was afraid of the weather. He would like to see it grow biting cold with a slight wind from the north. It was perfectly quiet; only Burman's regular baying could be heard, and the steady ticking of the large parlor clock.

Simen Melbö and Ola Nerbö had been good friends and good neighbors until well into the summer. In the spring Simen had taken a chance and sown the two large strips he owned down on the Longmoor with barley. Many laughed at him for doing so, for Longmoor lay very low and was much frost-swept, and unless there was an unusually warm spring the grain there would never ripen before the cold weather came.

And the weather did not warm up; on the contrary it was cold and damp—proper weather for the hillsides all right; but on the moors he could hardly expect to get much more than green fodder. Ola Nerbö, who had scant fodder, had then purchased the crop on the northern strip and had got a bargain.

But no sooner had midsummer slipped by than the warm weather came. It grew so excessively

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hot and dry that the hillsides were almost scorched, but the grain on the moors, where the soil was moist, got away to a good start, and it became apparent after a few weeks that this would prove the best yield of the year for both of them, if only nothing went wrong with the harvesting.

Then Simen began just a little to regret his transaction. He made it a point to drop in on Ola once or twice, and hinted somewhat feebly that the deal be called off: the harvesting and the hauling would be too much for Ola; he had enough grain as it was; it would hardly be worth his while to bother with it. At length Simon even suggested something in the way of a little bonus. But Ola wouldn't listen to it. Simen actually got the impression that he relished the situation immensely and even made fun of him!

They began to grow a bit formal and ceremonious towards each other, and before long little minor differences arose between them. No sooner did the domestic animal of one—whether it was a pig or a chick—stray into the fields of the other than it was locked up and word sent that it be fetched. Simen undertook to bar the footpath across the upper field; it wasn't long before there lay a huge bristling pine limb over the stile into Nerbö's south field, over which Simen generally took a short cut to reach the main highway.

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War had been declared.

Then one day, as he looked out of the window, Simen saw three suckling calves stalking about in the center of his Longmoor field. Berte immediately declared they were Ola's, "for there was one black one and one red one, and the third was a little larger."

Simen took Burman and started down. But Burman had more than ordinary sense. However much Simen egged him on, Burman still knew the difference between goats and calves,—and the calves were not particularly afraid of him either. Simen became angry, found a dry stick, and started after them. The calves took to their heels, awkwardly, their tails in the air. He after them! They found the opening in the fence; the two smaller succeeded in getting through, but the larger was not quick enough and sank down under a blow on the buttocks. Simen heaved a large rock after the two that got away and struck one of them. The stick he threw at Burman, who limped away howling, although it didn't strike him.

Ola had to kill his two calves.

The matter came up before the arbitration commission. Ola demanded compensation for his calves. Simen would give nothing, however; he had been perfectly within his rights, since they had trespassed on his field, and he even asked

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compensation for the damage done to his grain. There were threats of a law suit.

Since then the Melbö people had been very careful about their cattle. Not even a pig did they let out of the pen unless some one went along as guardian. To say nothing of the calves—these Berte herself tended, her knitting in her hand.

And then yesterday—she had taken her eyes off them for a moment, while she ran in to warm up the coffee. It could not have been more than a minute or so, but—of course!—they had got over into Ola Nerbö's field. Berte could not understand it! They had been quiet for a long time, and they had been quiet and peaceful when she left them; but, fact it was, she did not see them again until Ola Nerbö began chasing them out of his field.

They waited the whole day for some notification; but no notification came. Towards evening they spied Ola Nerbö jogging down the highway with two calves in front of him; he was presumably taking them to the bailiff.

It was this that Simen lay thinking about.

To the devil with the calves! Damned if he'd bail them out! If they once got into the courts they'd be eaten up in costs. Ola wouldn't grow

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fat on that! It was enough that he had done him on the Longmoor deal.

Yet the Longmoor grain was not so ripe but that it might freeze even yet. If it cleared up for good, Ola might just as well say farewell to the whole crop. If only a north wind would set in! Simen had already in the spring placed green brushwood around the whole of Longmoor and in between the strips. If he lighted these at the proper time, there could be no question of frost. If a north wind set in, he would only light the pile between the strips, and then Ola's strip might freeze up before his very eyes for all he cared!

But if a south wind set in? Well, in that case, he could afford to let his strip go too, rather than let Ola get the benefit of the smoke! If Ola had only overlooked this affair with the calves, perhaps,—but he had been depending on the weather! It was drizzling and mild last evening. Not a single green bough would he permit him to burn on his property—the rascal!

Little by little Simen fell asleep again, and he lay laboring and dreaming that he was chasing calves in the underbrush with a load of firewood on his back.

He awakened when Burman began scraping on the door for admittance.

It was about time too: it was almost light! He got up quickly, peered out the window, slipped

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on his heavy shoes, took a handful of phosphor matches from the fireplace ledge, wrapped them in a paper, stuck them in his vest pocket, and hurried out. Ugh,—it was cold! Instinctively he pulled his knitted cap down over one ear.

Out on the knoll he paused and looked out over the dale. The stars had already paled. It was quite light; the atmosphere, clear and transparent, smacked of dry salt. Everything near him appeared in delicate contours; the smaller branches of the trees shaded softly off into the air. There lay over the whole landscape a delicate yellow coloring, which far, far away—towards the distant horizon—little by little grew into a reddish tint, as on a cold winter day. A pale dim meteor shot over towards the west, cut the sky in two, and disappeared.

The pine grove on the lea to the rear, sprinkled as it was with hardwoods, likewise took a lighter hue. Across it, parallel with the lea, lay a thin strip of heavy fog, thick and white. It lay quite still: there was evidently no wind stirring in any direction!

Simen stood quietly looking at it. Ah, he could just barely see it moving towards the south,—there was a breeze from the north!

He hurried down, his knees bent beneath him, his coat tails touching his legs behind, while Burman made one long jump down the hill, stumbled

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in his eagerness, went on his nose, and rolled head over heels. As he passed by the potato field, he noticed that the frost had already nipped the outermost of the potato leaves. He had better hurry,—it was at sunrise that the frost was most dangerous.

He went in between the two Longmoor strips. Ah, how wonderful the grain stood! He cast a glance over toward Ola's. Well, he would save his own now. He had two piles of pine brush between the strips, and these he would light. He made a little opening in the edge of one of them. The branches were damp; he had to go over to a nearby birch and strip off some bark before he could get it started. In a few moments it was lit.

The fire crackled in the still morning. The smoke tried to rise, but the cold atmosphere pressed it down against the earth. Little by little it spread out, evenly, slowly; as a dark-blue mist it settled over the grain instead of dispersing—it was so still, so still—!

Simen got his breath, blew on his hands, and put them in his trouser pockets. The sun just then shot over the edge of the lea, a thin golden gleam on the pine tops towards the sky. Well, let it come,—he was safe now.

He stood a while and looked at the smoke. There crept over his face a cunning smile. Ha,—no harm in going round and looking at Ola's

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grain,—looking at it wouldn't warm it any. Instinctively he bent down and collected the birch bark he had not used and sauntered over towards it.

Hm! It was certainly a beautiful field of grain! He picked an ear and examined it. Fine awns, and the grain thick and round! No mere tailings here! Eight measures to the barrel—but not a whit more. Yet it might after all lose its weight as the sun shot up—the rascal!

He continued down the field. Carefully, from long rooted habit, he raised up with his foot such straws as lay over the edge, which he could otherwise not have escaped stepping on, let them glide tenderly through the hollow of his hand, picked up here and there a stick, which had crept in, and threw it in the ditch. Before he knew it he stood at the huge green brush pile at the northern end of the field. He stopped and looked out over it. The grain bent down, heavy with its yellow green ears, as if it knew its fate.

Hm—Hm? He shook his head. It was a shame,—this beautiful grain might have provided much food for cattle and people! He continued to stand thus a long while. Then he scratched his head quickly.

Hell—! God's gifts were God's gifts, no matter who owned them—and—Ola would end as a

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pauper anyway, sooner or later,—especially if he started suit!

Without really knowing what he was doing, he quickly made an opening in the brush pile, thrust some birch bark in, struck a match on the seat of his trousers, and lit it. A little later the smoke rose up, thick and heavy.

Simen stood a long time and watched it spread and settle down over the field. After a while he came to and mumbled, as if annoyed at his own stupidity, something between his teeth.

"Hm—hm! Well, that was just like me,—I have always been a silly chump."

"Bow-wow-wow-ow."

Burman cocked his head and started yelping up between the two fields towards the highway. Simen turned and followed him with his eyes.

What the—? He had to shade his eyes with his hand. Well,—if it wasn't the calves! And there was Ola, too. Ha, he had evidently be-thought himself and turned back—when it got cold—.

He went slowly over towards the fence. Ola stood leaning over it with both arms, resting. Behind him stood one of the calves chewing his coat tail. There was a broad smile on his face: he realized that Simen had saved his grain.

"Are you smoke-drying to-day?"

"Yes, and you're out with calves, I see."

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"Yes,—aren't they your calves? They came into my field yesterday,—and I chased them down the highway,—but—hm—I came to think they were perhaps yours,—and I thought it would be too bad if they ran wild and got lost."

"Well, that was very good of you,—for they are mine all right."

There was a pause.

"You'll have a nice harvest, Simen, this year on the Longmoor."

"Yes, very nice. It'll not be a bad year all the way round, if only the potatoes come through as they should."

"I don't see why they shouldn't now."

"Well, I don't know, there are some spots on my potatoes that I don't just like."

"So? Well—."

"You know more about such things than I do, Ola; I'd like very much to have you take a look at them and see whether it's dry rot or what,—if you have time, that is—."

Ola climbed the fence leisurely, and they sauntered up.

The sunbeams had slowly worked their way down the lea. They had now reached the smoke level. A slight sunrise breeze sprang up, set the smoke a whirl, and spread it: soon the smell of smoke had penetrated the whole dale.

Then the sun reached the potato field. The

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potato grass, which had stood green and luxuriant, collapsed all at once. It was frozen.

A thin blue smoke rose from the Melbö chimney.

“Well, you’d better come along up, Ola,—I see Berte has the coffee pot on.”

JACOB HILDITCH

GUINEA-JACK OR SKIPPER GERHARDTSEN'S COCK

JACOB HILDITCH (1864-) is one of the few writers in Norway who specialize in the short story. A native of Oslo, he takes his subjects from eastern Norway or from the coast. He describes the life of the lowly and obscure—small farmers, crofters, seafaring men—with a warmth of sympathy which sometimes leads him into a moralizing strain. A pleasant sense of humor pervades his books. *Guinea-Jack* is taken from a collection of his sea stories. Hilditch's popularity in Norway rests not only on his fiction, but also on his journalistic work. He edited for years a paper which he called *Trangviksposten* a witty but good-natured parody on the small town newspaper. He has also to his credit much newspaper work of a more serious kind.

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GUINEA-JACK OR SKIPPER GERHARDTSEN'S COCK

SKIPPER GERHARDTSEN was captain of the "Marie Louise," a bark of medium size, already singing its swan song in Class A 2, and engaged largely in the trade with America—pitch pine or petroleum, as the case might be. She ran a regular schedule almost, Skipper GerhardtSEN used to say. Therefore he was proud of her, for there were many that merely crossed the Baltic, many indeed, that scarce did even that.

To his great joy and the increase of his self-esteem, Skipper GerhardtSEN had once, in the all too brief prosperity he and his company had enjoyed some years back, departed from his schedule and made a flying trip to Africa, to the Gold Coast, as he used to say. God knows why,—for the port he had put in at lay actually nearer the Mediterranean.

It may be, perhaps, that "the Gold Coast" sounded a bit more romantic; and moreover this was the only visit he had made to Africa—as skipper, at all events. From this trip he had brought home all sort of curious objects, cocoa-

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nuts and rush mats, besides odd-looking earthenware bowls, and bows and arrows, illustrative of life among the uncivilized. For he had luckily chanced on a little shop, down near the docks of London, which carried a large assortment of all manner of heathenish curiosities.

But the cock he had actually bought in Africa. Not, to be sure, of a negro chieftain, as he used to say, but from a woman who sold poultry from a little lattice-work cart.

He had at first intended to eat the cock when he reached open sea and developed a longing for fresh meat. But as he grew more and more accustomed to him, he saw that he was an unusually beautiful bird, larger than most cocks, sporting a brilliantly golden red color, glistening blue-black wings and tail feathers, and a comb that ran full of blood or paled, according as his humor changed. Besides he was a devil of a hero at sea. In his hutch he stood foursquare, steady-ing himself on his sea legs, and was equally merry in rough weather or in a calm. At twilight he flew up to his perch, snapped his claws about it resoundingly, and went to sleep as confidently as though he still lay in the egg. But early—early every morning—he crew as if in sheer delight.

All this made Skipper Gerhardtsen decide finally to allow the cock to live. He let him out

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one day on deck when the weather was fine to see how he would behave. The cock flapped his wings, shook his feathers, then crew loud and gloriously, to signify he felt first rate, thank you.

"He may turn out to be very amusing on board," mused Skipper Gerhardtson.

The bird had to have a name, of course; every creature on board has to have a name. The skipper speculated long, and by nightfall he had it. He christened him "Guinea-Jack" in memory of the African jaunt, and he should live, he decreed, as long as ever he cared to.

"But where the devil d'you get that cock from, Skipper?"

"Guinea-Jack, you mean? Oh, I sneaked him in a trade with a devil of a black nigger down on the Gold Coast when I was there last——."

To pull off something like that, Skipper Gerhardtson mused, would prove mighty interesting in the days to come.

* * *

Guinea-Jack had already spent close to three years on board the "Marie Louise." He had been ashore that one winter the bark was at home, but in the spring he had gone out with them again. It was obvious that he was happiest when on board. On shore he was dejected and out of sorts, hung his wings, and set up long plaintive

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cries, instead of crowing lustily as a cock should. But no sooner had he come on board than he strutted as lordly as ever.

The crew on the "Marie Louise" was not so completely taken with Guinea-Jack as the skipper himself. The carpenter, the steward, and Thorvald, the carpenter's son, who hardly knew himself whether he was ordinary seaman or able-seaman, did not, to be sure, say much, for all three of them had been on board since the day the cock arrived, and they had in a way accustomed themselves to him. But the floating members of the crew were always airing their troubles. The deckhand, who had to swab the deck, insisted it was downright filthy to have such a bird running loose. The seamen now and then watched their chances and tried to put the fear of God in him by yelling at him or kicking him—preferably when the skipper was asleep. The second mate ignored him with quiet scorn. He tried not to look in his direction; on occasions when he could not avoid it, he merely raised his eyebrows. When the skipper came on deck after his midday siesta, and, good-natured and easy, his meerschaum pipe between his teeth, sauntered forward, and coaxed tenderly, "Here Jack! Tip, tip, tip!" the second mate smiled pityingly and turned his back.

On such occasions, I say, the second mate

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laughed contemptuously and pityingly. "It's disgusting to see a full grown skipper carry on with a great big cock like that! Isch!" And when the cock, in response to the call, came running on his stiff legs, with long strides and wings drooping, the second mate was not in the least averse to lunging after it with his foot, if the opportunity presented itself, and the skipper wasn't looking.

"Look out there!" he would call to his neighbor. "Here comes Goldentop!" And he shook his head angrily.

"Damme, it's worse than if we had a swaggering trooper on board running and galloping around on deck!"

A steward could not, more than anyone else, be expected to remain with one and the same vessel for ever and ever. It was therefore not so strange that the old steward on the "Marie Louise" left her in Sutton Ridge. He had expected the bark to turn home after this trip, and that had been the intention, as a matter of fact, but when she prepared to go to Mobile instead, the old fellow bade her adieu.

There was no great choice of stewards in Sutton Ridge and still less of strictly Norse stewards. Nevertheless Skipper Gerhardtson managed to sign up one the very day before he was to clear out. He was from Mandal, a Man-

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dalusian, as he used to say, and according to his own story he had in recent years shipped mostly on American boats and preferably on steamers. So that perhaps in a mere matter of puddings or pies or dumplings it might well be that he was a fellow superior to most. And a sailor he was too, in a pinch. That one could infer from his Yankee beard and from the inky figures on the back of his hands, and on his arms, and on his chest, visible through his open flannel shirt.

In this steward Guinea-Jack found his mortal enemy. Not that the steward immediately set about to affront him, but he looked upon him only too apparently as something that was edible merely. He was generous toward him as regards food and such. But he had a mean way of grabbing hold of him every now and then and clamping his hands round his neck and yanking him up. During the first few days the steward had noticed that he crew like the devil; he awakened the whole watch below at three o'clock in the morning. But then he had reflected in the quiet of his mind, "It'll not be many days surely before I'll have him in my pot."

When the "Marie Louise" had been under sail a week or so, Skipper Gerhardtson summoned the steward one Saturday morning.

"Now, steward," he said, "to-morrow is Sunday, and, what is more, to-morrow I should cele-

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brate my twenty-fifth anniversary if I were home. Yes, sirree, it's twenty-five years to-morrow since I was married. It would not be amiss therefore if we had something special for dinner to-morrow——."

That was something for the "Mandalusian" steamboat steward, who had simply been aching to show off his really rare skill in cooking,—and above all on this bark, which carried nothing but salt beef and pork and stockfish and molasses soup. His whole face glowed at the mere thought of everything he would concoct.

"One moment, Captain! One moment only, I say! I'll bake fresh white bread early to-morrow—by George, I will. And for dinner—it's rotten there's no macaroni on board! I could have made a fine piped pudding. I'll have to make a rice pudding instead. That, too, is good and tasty. And then I'll perhaps make a salt-mutton pie. That will also taste good——."

"But this, steward, is nothing more than cat-lap," interrupted the skipper. "I really had in mind something a little more substantial," he explained.

The steward had that very moment conceived a glorious idea. He grinned from ear to ear in amazement that he hadn't thought of it sooner. He gave one peremptory flourish of the hand.

"What the—! Excuse me, Captain,—but we

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have this beast of a bird on board. We have this cock! If you so wish I'll fry it in butter, or if you prefer, I'll cook it with——."

Skipper Gerhardtsen paled outright at the very thought.

"Guinea-Jack! The African cock! Are you crazy, steward! I got him in a deal with a negro chieftain the last time I was down there. He has been on board three years now. Guinea-Jack! Ha, ha! Really you must be crazy. D'you think perhaps I'd eat my own crew? Guinea-Jack, indeed! There's no such cock to be found anywhere. He crows like a regular clock. He—he——."

From that evening on there was less room for Guinea-Jack. The steward gave him nothing except when the skipper happened on deck. Yet he was as lordly as ever, crew as regularly, and seemed not to notice anything.

But every single day the steward delivered himself of long lamentations to the other members of the crew. He had been fooled, he claimed, and insisted it should have been their duty to let him know how matters really stood. At the time he had come aboard and had seen this red cock strut about on deck, he had naturally assumed that it was no different from cocks generally on board other Christian ships—that it was, so to speak, fresh meat. Otherwise he would never

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have hired with the boat. He had put up with this crowing, too, because he believed it would come to an end in the space of a week or so. But damned if he'd want to travel around with poultry and live stock! It was surely no dirt farm he had taken service on, was it? Why, this was worse than hiring on a nigger boat with Hamites and heathens,—in fact, it was a menagerie. He had been sailing the seas now twenty-two years and more, but this was the first time he had been routed out every blessed morning of the year by cock crow. He had verily become a cheesemaker or a dairy maid! He had a terrible time of it—a terrible time. Every morning he had the nightmare. As he lay listening in his sleep to this crowing right outside, it would come over him that he sat in an old farm scow and rowed potatoes and milk cans. Indeed, five mornings in a stretch he had slept in a sweat and dreamed that an old woman stood over him telling him he'd better hurry and rouse himself,—he was to go cranberry picking. Just as though he were a young whelp again! If they had only told him in the first place in Sutton Ridge that this beast of a cock had been taken on, he could have put a stop to the crowing easily—without hurting the creature one bit, since he was the delight of the skipper's heart. He certainly wouldn't harm man or beast, but he'd no sooner

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be in Mobile than he'd make straight for the apothecary. There were, thank God, remedies for such fool notions.

When finally the "Marie Louise" this time too had come to the end of her trip, had been towed in and made fast to the docks, the steward, as he was taking his first shore leave, nodded knowingly to the boys.

"I'll soon put a crimp in the critter's neck."

"Do you intend to get the consul to take him in charge?" laughed one of the boys.

"The consul? You're crazy! No, sir,—I'm making straight for the apothecary. He'll have something."

"You don't mean to kill Goldentop surely?" the carpenter asked in consternation. "If ever the skipper got wind that you killed Guinea-Jack it would be your finish too!"

"Kill? Do I look as if I want to kill anybody? If I had wanted to murder this nigger cock, I'd have taken his measure long ago. Or supposing I'd wanted to do it unwittingly, I had simply fetched a flask from the oil room and fed him some in his porridge, and he'd have been bunged up internally. And no one would have been the wiser. No, I certainly shan't do anything that'll hurt him. But, by jiminy, there'll be an end to this crowing—during the middle watch at all events——."

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With that the steward, spruced up and in excellent spirits, left the ship. He intended first to go up to Market Street to call on Mrs. MacHuddon, who had a bar and a boarding house there. In case any of the men off duty cared to go, they were welcome to join him, for he was well known here, better, indeed, than in Farsund and Mandal even. It was at least the twentieth time he had been in Mobile—a beastly filthy hole, for that matter, if one were to speak God's truth. It was only these Mrs. MacHuddons who were really nice and sociable people—both she and the girls.

It was not until well towards morning that the steward returned from his leave ashore and his visit with Mrs. MacHuddon. Guinea-Jack had already sounded the first of his morning calls in the earliest gray of dawn, and the steward went quietly to his berth to sleep away the two or three hours that remained before he had to rustle the coffee pot. He glowered ever so little toward the coop underneath the forecastle, where the cock sat wide awake and scratched his beak along the perch.

“Just you wait! It's all over with your tremolos now, believe me!”

After his midday nap the skipper went ashore, as was his wont when he lay in port, and the steward immediately took a long nap the entire

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afternoon, as was his wont when he had been ashore.

Towards evening he sat much occupied in the door of the galley and kneaded a strange mixture of flour, crushed hardtack, and water. The boys stood around and eyed him dubiously. When the dough was just about ready, he brought forth a little flask and read the prescription—*Ten drops for adults; for children one drop for each year up to five*. "Adult he is," he muttered, and at that poured, not drop by drop, but a good bit at once into the dough, and afterwards stirred deliberately.

"It'll not be properly mixed that way," remarked Martin. "In some places there'll be a lot and in other places none."

"By gosh—you're right!" the steward replied, as he scratched his ear. He filled the dipper about half with water, emptied into it a goodly portion of the flask, stirred it a bit, and then poured the whole of it over the dough. This made it too thin again, but a fistfull of flour and cracker crumbs soon thickened it.

"Now it'll be properly mixed!" the steward nodded, and sniffed at it. "I have night insurance here—enough for a whole round trip, by crickets, He surely wouldn't be so cussed, would he, as to refuse to eat it? Oh, I guess not!"

He got up and hobbled over the deck, trying

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his best to imitate the skipper. And he feigned a tenderness in his voice.

"Here, Jack! Tip, tip, tip!"

The whole crew watched him, intensely interested, as he thrust the dough in toward him, and coaxed softly.

"Here, little one,—this is for you! Go ahead! That's right—that's a nice boy now! Taste it! It's something good for Jackie! Tip, tip, tip! Come,—up again!"

Guinea-Jack clucked, and pecked at the dough, indifferently at first, then greedily. The steward had seen to it that he would have an appetite by evening. At length he had to take the dough away from him.

"That's enough now, you miserable red rascal! Would you eat it all at once? Now—by gosh!" as he turned to the others, "he should be properly loaded! He'll not crow now for a while."

"But what in the world was it that you gave him?" asked the carpenter anxiously. "It surely wasn't anything dangerous?"

"What was it? Why, opium, of course, you fool. What else is there for sleep? Good night, Jackie! Sleep tight!"

With that he slammed the hutch door to and spread the old bit of canvas over it.

* * *

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That night Skipper Gerhardtsen came on board with three friends,—Markussen of the “Aurora,” Berg of the “Emma,” and Evensen of the “Stamford.” They had supper together on shore, and now they planned a rubber of whist and a glass of toddy on board the “Marie Louise” with Skipper Gerhardtsen.

“Oh—whew, but I’m tired!” Evensen drawled, later in the evening, stretched his arms, yawned, and looked at his watch. “Half past twelve! It’s shamefully late.”

“Well, let’s finish the rubber,” pleaded Markussen.

“All right, but it’ll have to be the last.”

“Are you crazy, boys?” interrupted Skipper Gerhardtsen. “To think of quitting now! Why it’s a bright clear summer night. See here now! We’ll brew another drink and let the old clock go hang. Your deal, Markussen——.”

“Will you gentlemen be good enough to tell me just when you really intend to quit?” Skipper Evensen asked again, about an hour later. He had given up the whist, after first making himself disagreeable by blurting out he didn’t give a rap what his partner, Skipper Berg, had bid. He now sat in a corner of the sofa and struggled bravely to keep his eyes open as he stirred round his new toddy. The other three played with the dummy.

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Skipper Gerhardtsen was already pretty red in the face and pretty boisterous.

"Go!" he exclaimed. "'Go' did you say? Aren't you stretching it a bit too far, my dear Evensen? Is your deckhand perhaps the kind that bawls when you are late ashore?"

"But, good Lord, Gerhardtsen! You know I don't as a rule break up a good party. But there must be reason in all things. I merely want to know *when*. Set a definite hour, and I'll be satisfied."

"Half past six," said Berg of the "Emma." He had not opened his mouth the last half hour.

"Well," exclaimed Skipper Gerhardtsen, "if I must be serious, I may as well tell you, gentlemen, there's a good old custom here on board that visitors never leave the cabin before the cock crows—not at this time of year anyway."

There was of course no such good old custom. It was only one the skipper had concocted on the spur of the moment. But he seemed himself almost to believe it, for he added with much feeling, "It has never happened yet that a guest has left a party here before Jack sings out. As long as we have such an excellent time-piece, we——."

"When, as a rule, does he sing out—this nigger cock of yours?" asked Evensen, listlessly.

Skipper Gerhardtsen consulted his watch. "At

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this time of the year he crows at thirty-five after two."

"Oh, surely not on the minute exactly," Evensen opined.

"On the minute? What'll you wager? I say it won't be ten minutes one way or the other. Do you think I'd keep him if he were not something of a rarity? We'll brew another drink, and then we'll wait for Jackie. You can rely on him, I assure you."

While the others busied themselves with their glasses, Skipper Gerhardtsen made a flying trip on deck, and removed the canvas hanging from the hutch. Jack would of course crow even as it was. But, heavens,—it couldn't do any harm. He'd be wider awake if the daylight came streaming in.

Skipper Evensen awakened in the sofa corner and thought he had slept a long time. First he cast a hasty glance about to ascertain where he really was. Gerhardtsen sat leaning backwards in a campstool, his arms limp at his side, sleeping with resounding snores. Markussen and Berg were still at the table, but they lay toppled forward, their heads on their outstretched arms, likewise asleep, sound and fast. He looked at the time. Half past three.

"But what the——! Berg! Markussen!"

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They both came to, and Gerhardtsen began to grumble.

"That was a nice cock to waken us!" said Evensen.

Gerhardtsen looked at his watch. "Hm, we've slept, I suppose, and haven't heard him."

"I sat up and kept watch until just a moment ago," explained Markussen meekly.

"He'll crow yet; he'll crow yet," Gerhardtsen reassured.

"Yes, about dinner time," Evensen ventured.

"I'll wager inside of ten minutes." Skipper Gerhardtsen was about to explain, but Evensen interrupted him.

"He'll crow yet! He'll crow yet! Hell! Can't you see how silly it is for full grown people like ourselves to sit like this and wait on a good-for-nothing cock?" He was nervous and angry too. "I've never before, I swear, waited on cock-crow, and damme if I'll do it now. Nonsense! To sit here and take our cue from a stupid creature like that. Surely one can go too far too——."

Skipper Gerhardtsen was no less nervous and no less upset.

"'Stupid creature' you say! Why, do you know, Evensen, I got him in a trade down on the Gold——"

"I don't give a hang where you got him! But this I do know——."

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"Five minutes! Five minutes!" Skipper Gerhardtsen almost pleaded. "It is a really remarkable cock, I tell you——."

But Skipper Evensen had pulled on his coat and stood already at the door. "Berg! Markussen! You'd better come now. This is nothing but silliness——."

He sighed deeply, did Skipper Gerhardtsen, as he accompanied his three guests forward to the ladder. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He felt downright grateful accordingly for Skipper Evensen's suggestion.

"Let's go forward at any rate and take a look at this remarkable cock of yours. For I hear the cocks crowing round us on the docks and even far up the shore. It's only yours that's silent. He must be a rarity, indeed."

As they drew near the hutch Skipper Gerhardtsen managed to be seized with a cough. It might possibly be that Jack too would start in when he heard it.

But no,—Jack sat still as ever. Skipper Gerhardtsen found a thin stick and scratched him behind the ear, and then with lightening speed withdrew it as though it were a cannon and linstock he had to do with. Then he waited in tense expectation. Jackie would surely sound forth now.

But Guinea-Jack merely lowered one eyebrow

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slowly for a moment and edged over half an inch on his perch. That was all.

"It seems to me he's snoring," said Evensen.

Skipper Gerhardtsen took his stick again and deliberately tickled the cock on one side. Jack again opened his eyes, got up, arched his back, and looked as if he were about to crow. But when it came right down to it he did something quite different. With that he settled down on his perch again, drew in his neck, and slept on.

Skipper Gerhardtsen became unusually angry. He tore open the door and with a lightning thrust shook the cock by the neck.

"Can't you crow, you red devil, you!"

Guinea-Jack opened one eye and looked listlessly at his master, and then as slowly faced right about. He seemed about to settle down once more when the skipper tore open the door again and seized him by the wing. He shook him so vigorously he sent the feathers flying.

"You miserable nigger! You miserable lazy drake! You—you—you!"

Guinea-Jack plunged his beak in the skipper's finger and let himself down to the cage floor. He was too sluggish to mount to his perch again, and therefore crept off into a corner to settle down to sleep once more. He seemed almost to croon from inert satiety, as he paced about a couple of times before finally settling down for good.

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"Typ, typ!" said Skipper Evensen. "Well, if he didn't crow! Didn't you hear something? I could swear that he crew. It was only a wee bit, to be sure, but——."

The fact is that Skipper Evensen was wide awake now and thought it great fun to tease Gerhardtsen. But Gerhardtsen, who was a tender and sympathetic sort, even when he was sober, but especially when he was drunk, repented his recent harsh treatment of Guinea-Jack. Now he sat crouched down in front of the hutch, his long arm stretched out, scratching the bird on the neck.

"Yes, Jackie! At-a-boy!"

"May be he's a kind of 'sea-cock,' as they call them," said Skipper Evensen. "Then no doubt he never crows except when he's on the high seas. You'll see, Gerhardtsen, that's it!"

Skipper Gerhardtsen whirled about and laughed triumphantly.

"Yes, by crickets, a sea-cock! I'll be damned if it isn't a sea-cock! Well, Jackie, you're a good one, you! You knew it all along!"

"But, gentlemen, do you know what?" asked Skipper Evensen. "It's time we were off. Now you, Gerhardtsen, go right in and lie down. You certainly need to! Isch! Grown married men, sitting here, scratching that ugly cock——."

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They found the ladder and stumbled arm in arm up the dock.

He slept a great deal that day, Skipper Gerhardtsen did. It was one snooze after another all day long, and between naps he took a little stretch on deck to look around. Always he found an opportunity to ask some one or other whether Guinea-Jack had crowed recently or not. But no—there had not been a sound heard all day.

Gerhardtsen began to find the whole thing very amusing. Guinea-Jack was surely all the more remarkable as a cock by reason of this oddity that he crew only on the high seas. He might reasonably let on for that matter that he had trained him to it.

But about seven o'clock in the evening Guinea-Jack crew so loudly that the skipper started up from his sofa and turned out on deck. There stood the cock on the hutch roof, flapping his wings and crowing so strenuously that it almost seemed he would rend the corners of his mouth. This was too much for the skipper. He looked at his watch and grumbled. The cock crew once more, with a vengeance, as if he meant to atone for all that he had neglected. Gerhardtsen shook his head and went into the cabin again. That cock had surely gone crazy!

Ten minutes later the deckhand of the "Stamford," which lay directly opposite on the other

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side of the dock, came rowing over. He pulled up at the stern of the "Marie Louise," jumped up, and came on board. He wouldn't even talk to the mate; he wanted to see the captain himself. He encountered the skipper just at the stairs to the poop. The lad pulled off his cap.

"Skipper Evensen wants to congratulate you on your cock. He heard him crow this morning—at just five minutes of seven."

* * *

Skipper Gerhardtsen stayed in Mobile over a month. During all that time Guinea-Jack crew at the oddest hours, sometimes at two or three o'clock in the afternoon, sometimes only after dark in the evening. But in the morning he never crew. Of late he had also formed the habit of crowing just as Skipper Gerhardtsen set foot on deck after a cozy little visit ashore. That was surely nothing to start a fuss over. Evensen of the "Stamford" said it all came from improper care. Did any one ever hear the like! Just as if Gerhardtsen didn't understand cocks! Why, he had once got hold of a cock in a trade with a black nigger devil down on the Gold Coast——. Ah, yes, to be sure, this was the one! But that fool Evensen! "Give me the cock," he had said,— "and I'll straighten him out in a hurry!"

It was their last night in Mobile. Skipper Gerhardtsen had been ashore and got his papers, and

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he was returning early, after a few quiet drinks with Evensen and Markussen and all the others, —good fellows they were. He was to have a pilot at the first sign of dawn, for he wanted to get under way in the morning breeze. But what the devil! He was no sooner on board than the beastly cock began to crow and alarm both the “Marie Louise” and the other boats. Just then the steward came out with a bowl and a lantern in his hands. He also had been ashore in the evening, and he was now giving Jack his supper, —he hadn’t had time before.

The steward wanted to face right about when he saw the skipper, but the skipper motioned him over.

“Say, steward, let’s take a look at this cock. What the devil do you suppose ails him?”

Guinea-Jack rose up to face the light from the lantern and started crowing again with all his might.

“At half past eight at night!” Gerhardtson mumbled.

Then he caught sight of something that made him stagger. Directly underneath the cock lay a shining white egg.

“Steward,” he said, and seized him by the arm, “Do you see that, steward? I’ll be damned if he doesn’t lay, too! The swine! The miserable swine!”

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"It is cussedness, Captain. Only cussedness! I have seen so much deviltry from this cock since I came on board that I'd be ashamed to tell it all. He's been on the dock, too, Captain. He meant to run away, I imagine, for I don't think he thrives on board. But, thank goodness, I got him back."

"Not a bite shall he have!" said the skipper, as the steward went to set the bowl in the hutch. "Away with him—this very instant. He might perhaps be a suitable cock for Evensen on the 'Stamford',—for he thinks he knows so darn well how to manage them."

A little later the skipper had called the dock watchman on board.

"Now, see here, watchman," he said, "it's about this cock. Will you take charge of him, and either to-night or to-morrow early take him over to the 'Stamford' yourself, or send some one else with him. The 'Stamford', you know, lies out in the river now. And you're to say it's from me and that Captain Evensen is to have him. You understand?"

"This evening, sir," said the watchman, put Guinea-Jack under his coat, and ambled ashore.

Skipper Gerhardtsen laughed heartily in his beard, as he stood on the poop at early dawn the next morning, while the "Marie Louise" was

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being towed out. Directly before him lay the "Stamford."

"Oh, Captain, go right up close to the 'Stamford', if you can," he called to the pilot.

He wished Evensen well. He would thumb his nose at him next time, he would! A cock that crows at night and lays eggs,—yes, lays eggs! Isch, such a beast!

Just as the "Marie Louise" slipped by he heard a crowing over on the "Stamford," a crowing that rent the air. That must be Guinea-Jack. About that there could be no mistake. Skipper Gerhardtson took out his watch in amazement. But he forgot all about it, for there aft, on the "Stamford" poop, stood Evensen himself, half dressed, waving and chuckling in a most irritating manner.

In the galley of the "Marie Louise" sat the steward eating his first breakfast.

"Are we to have eggs on board too now?" asked one of the boys, who happened by, and saw the steward halve an egg, which he held between two thick fingers.

"You fool!" the steward replied. "I had to buy one of these, don't you see, to get rid of this confounded cock. I couldn't very well keep him in opium all the way up the Atlantic."

PETER EGGE

WHEN PEDER SOLBERG CAME HOME

PETER EGGE (1869-) is an extremely productive writer, who has done solid and excellent work in the domain of the short story, the novel, and the drama. He was born in the city of Trondhjem, and achieved his first distinct success with a group of stories from his native city and its environs. In his later works he often returns to the same milieu. As a novelist Egge first distinguished himself by his historical novels, *Jomfru Nelly Maartens*, *Gammelholm*, and others. In his more recent works he has used a modern background. *In the Deep Fjords* (1920) is a broad painting of the hard, proud peasant aristocracy in a secluded valley of Trøndelagen. *Hansine Solstad* shows the finer side of family pride—the consciousness of a stainless record for generations, which sustains through unmerited disgrace. *Jægtvig and His God* is a study of a poor shoemaker who thinks he is born to create a new religion. The story in this volume, *When Peder Solberg Came Home*, is characteristic of Egge's sympathy with the humble folk who faithfully carry on without thought of reward. It shows also his quiet, low-toned intensity, and his preoccupation with the inner life of his people rather than the outward events of their lives. Egge's humor is given free play in a series of comedies, and he has also written serious dramas which have been successfully produced on the stage.

Peter Egge

WHEN PEDER SOLBERG CAME HOME

THE cottage in which lived the wife of Peder Solberg, seaman, faced the street which people call Lökken.

One of its windows stood wide open, for it was now afternoon, on a warm day in June, and within sat the wife, her back to the street. Her sewing had fallen from her lap to the clean and white-scoured floor. Farther back at a little table sat her daughter humped over a diminutive sewing machine. She was not working, but sat leaning her elbows on the machine, looking towards her mother or out beyond her into the street. It was just as quiet on the street as within.

Beside the machine lay a letter, which the daughter had just finished reading aloud to her mother. Neither of them now spoke, and everything was quiet. But every now and then the daughter picked up the letter and glanced at it and then laid it down again. And she looked over towards her mother again or out beyond her into the street.

“Well, this time there can’t be any doubt about

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it," said the mother, as she picked up her sewing from the floor.

"No, this time, you'll see, father will really and truly come home," the daughter remarked.

Her name was Gunelie. The day before she had returned home, having finished a term of service, and not being due to begin her new term until the day after to-morrow. She was barely eighteen years old, but she had such broad and strong shoulders that one could hardly believe that sorrow would ever weigh them down, and her bosom thrust itself out like a little self-willed creature.

"Next month it'll be five years since he left."

"Ye-es," said Gunelie, and set her machine to whirring.

The mother also took to her sewing. It was necessary to make use of her time these two days she had Gunelie at home, and neither of them said another word about the father's prospective return.

"In case he comes before you leave, we can rig up a bed for you over there," the mother said later in the evening, as they undressed to go to bed, pointing towards the corner underneath the window.

"Yes, we can do that very easily."

And then they talked of something else.

On the morning of the second day Gunelie left

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home to begin her service with her new employers. A bare-footed lad conveyed her little trunk in an old baby carriage.

The boat from England with Peder Solberg was expected late in the afternoon; for he had mustered out in London. But the exact hour no one knew for certain. It might be early, or it might be late. It depended on so many things, both on the cargo and the weather. When she had finished with her dinner and the dinner dishes, the wife sat down to her sewing. The machine whirred away, and she worked industriously, as if she were in great haste.

Well, he was forty-six now, Peder was. Just as old as herself, and no doubt he would find many things changed when he came home this time . . . Anton and Johan—the twins—gone to sea this spring . . . probably he knew nothing of that, for it was hardly likely he had come across them in any of the ports. And Kristine dead,—but that he knew. It could not be denied—Peder had not been any great hand at writing, and consequently she had been no great hand either. . . . Once she had really thought he had forgotten her. . . . That English boat he shipped in had perhaps not been so easy. But now he was coming after all. And all the times he had thought of coming! But the trip was long, and it took him far to the north . . .

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and costly it was, too, and his seaman's wage did not stretch very far, when children had to be given a start in life, or they died and had to be buried. So it had had to be put off and put off—the journey home.

She kept the machine going steadily, and scarcely gave herself time to look up whenever she stopped it. She was in such a hurry.

It might have been about seven o'clock when she heard people enter the kitchen from the courtyard lugging something that was heavy. She quickly got up and went out. There stood Peder Solberg, her husband, his purse in his hand. He was just giving a lad a shilling for having helped him with his chest, which they had stowed away in a corner. And the boy went.

Husband and wife stood stock still for a moment before she offered him her hand.

"Welcome home!" she said.

"Thanks!"

"Is the boat already in?"

"Yes, just got in."

She led the way, and he followed, slowly and heavily, into the living room. His broad-brimmed hat he pulled off, and after a bit he sat down near the door. His eyes were dark and hollow, with gray rings underneath, and they shied a little to one side. He seemed to prefer

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turning his entire face half away. It was pale, with a long, dark beard.

"You have changed some, I see," said his wife.

"Yes,—I suppose so." Then after a pause, he added, "I'm not much good any more."

His wife merely nodded; her face was thoughtful.

"I have been worrying about that, too," she murmured. "It was the shipwreck in the Mediterranean, I suppose, that broke you?"

"Yes."

"If you'd come home right away after the wreck, maybe you might have got well?" she asked.

Always before answering he seemed to bethink himself.

"Well—these two years since then have not been easy—not been easy."

He bent forward and rested his elbows on his knees, threw his whole weight on them, and relaxed. His hat he still held in his hand.

"Are the boys home?" he asked after a bit.

"No, they left this spring."

"Well, I've sort of thought they'd left. You wrote last year they were to be confirmed this spring."

"Yes."

They were both silent now a few moments.

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"I'll have something to eat for you soon," she then said.

She went out into the kitchen and left the door standing wide open. He continued to sit on. Once in a while he raised his head and looked toward the window, as though he were eyeing some one who went by, whom he thought he ought to recognize. But though the window was at the other end of the room he did not walk over to it to make sure. In the kitchen the fire crackled underneath the coffee pot, and he heard her cutting bread.

While the coffee was settling she came back into the room and gathered up her sewing and put it away.

"You have regular work," he remarked, and looked over at the sewing.

"Well, yes—lately, that is; but you see I'm no first class seamstress, and so the pay isn't very much after all."

"You have been hurt?" she asked him suddenly, as she pointed to his hand.

He surveyed his right hand. It lacked the ring finger and the little finger.

"Yes, haven't I ever written about that?"

"No."

"I thought I'd written you. The doctor had to amputate them."

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For some time she merely stared at the mutilated hand.

"Heavens!"

She brought in the coffee and the food, and he drew up to the table. He ate and drank, but she was not hungry. So she merely poured herself a half cup of coffee, emptied it into her saucer, and cooled it before she drank it.

Later she went over to the window and opened it. It was almost ten o'clock, and the sun could no longer be seen from the room. But it crimsoned half the sky and colored all the houses in the town a glorious red, which all had to take notice of and remark upon. For it was so unbelievable—though the sun set more beautifully here in this town than in most places on God's earth.

"Did you notice how sweet the hedge in the churchyard smelled this evening?" she asked.

"Yes, just as on the night I went away."

"That's five years ago now," she added after a pause.

"Isn't it rather longer?"

"That's long enough, seems to me."

"Well, you may be right."

She made up the bed. But he still sat at the table, where he had eaten, and neither of them said anything. The bright red glow vanished completely. The heavens became blue with no

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sun-red streaks, and into the room there crept a white subdued light. One could scarcely know what time of day it was if one judged by the light alone. One could still read the fine print of the hymn book as easily as in broad daylight; for the town lies far to the north, and the sun, whether near at hand or far away, is kind to it as a rule.

"And what do you suppose I'd better do—now that the sea no longer will have me?"

She looked reassuringly up at him.

"Oh, you'll live as long as I live and can sew."

They were both silent again for a while, and they undressed and went to bed. He folded her in his huge arms and held her close for a long time.

"Well, at any rate, I am home," he said, in a voice that trembled.

And she drew back her head, which she had pressed to his bosom, and looked into his face. But her voice broke with tears and tenderness.

"Yes, and thank God there's room for you, too—now that we are alone."

JOHAN BOJER
THE HOME-COMING

JOHAN BOJER (1872-) gained his wide knowledge of all sorts and conditions of men from his own varied experience. He is a selfmade man. Even as a mere child he had to work and shift for himself, and while yet a lad he tasted the hardships of winter fishing in Lofoten. His knowledge of books he gained in part from a course at the school for non-commissioned officers in Trondhjem, but chiefly from his own voracious reading. Later he broadened his outlook by several years' residence abroad, chiefly in France. While his characters are nearly always Norwegian, the fundamental ideas in Bojer's books are of universal significance, and this fact has contributed, together with his vivacity and his gifts as a story-teller, to win him popularity outside of his own country. His circle of readers is especially large in France and the English-speaking countries, but his fame has reached even India.

Bojer first gained recognition at home by the novel *A Procession of the People* (1896) in which he showed the disintegrating effect of politics. A few years later came in quick succession the psychological novels *A Pilgrimage*, *The Power of a Lie* (Norwegian title, *Troens Magt*), and *Treacherous Soil* (Norwegian title, *Vort Rige*). The main theme is the inexorableness of retribution—not even repentance can wipe out the consequences of wrongdoing. It is the same note that is dominant in *The Home-Coming*. Among all his books probably none has had a wider appeal than *The Great Hunger*, written during the war. It is the story of a man who loses the world but regains his faith in God by his own act of charity to an enemy. Bojer's later books, *God and Woman* (Norwegian title, *Dyrendal*), *The Last of the Vikings*, and *Our Own People* are truthful and sympathetic stories of the Norwegian plain people, although the scene of the last named is on the American prairies.

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THE HOME-COMING

A NOVEMBER night, with a north wind blowing and a moon and a frost, can drive even the watch dog into his kennel. It is a weather for spooks. It is as though all the dead voices were let loose—from roofs and walls and chimneys—from the forest below Lindegaard, which swishes and moans—from the broken reeds at the mouth of the river, which play such melancholy melodies. If by chance a solitary pedestrian comes down the highway he turns up his coat collar over his ears and presses on as though afraid of something he is unwilling to mention by name. The lights in the little fishermen's huts along the beach go out one by one, but in their beds within the people still lie awake. The hollow drone of the sea from out beyond Blaahæia fills the whole night with an eerie dread—God help him who is out on the sea this night.

Perhaps, if one but knew, behind some dimly lighted window in this or that place there lies a poor sinner struggling with death. It is on such a night, no doubt, that we must wander hence. The white-frosted earth, swathed in moonlight

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as in a shroud, brings many a soul to remember that he has done one thing or another in the course of time which was not as it should be.

The Lindegaard forest seemed like a dark blanket spread out between the main buildings of Lindegaard and its cluster of cottages. The road through it narrowed to a thin moonlit strip, and this road was now quite deserted. There was no sound of driving, no sound of walking, no sound of traffic whatever; but in the ruts from the wheels ice glittered—if a wagon had come along, the ice would have crunched beneath the wheels.

But what was that! At a point where the forest swallowed up the silvery road a little dark spot came into sight. It moved. It was some living object. Against the wind it came—nearer, ever nearer. It grew to the size of a human being, and cast a shadow over the white-frosted moor along the highway, as if it were followed by its own specter. Who could be out so late at night?

It was a woman. Over her head she wore a large woolen shawl, which covered her breast and back as well. Her whole form was black and suggested that of a nun. Her gait was uncertain, her face pale, wrinkled, emaciated like a skeleton's, and tufts of white hair protruded from beneath her shawl. One does not get rosy cheeked sitting pent up for fifteen years. One does not

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get robust going about all those years yearning and longing for home and worrying one's heart away over all the evil one has done.

Now finally—she was returning. It was almost unbelievable—but so it was. She was approaching the old familiar village by the fjord. The dark specters of peat-stacks along the highway she knew intimately, and she sensed the old moor's characteristic smell. She opened her old eyes and paused a moment to look about. Was it no mere dream this time? Was she really here?

Then she bent her old frame forward again against the wind and walked and walked. No one knew she was coming. No one expected her tonight. She herself could not write, nor could Elias read for that matter. And why not come unannounced? She could then find out how the poor old fellow lived from day to day.

She had now come abreast of the first of the little houses. The windows glittered in the moonlight, but there was no light visible within. And again she had to pause a moment and open her eyes wide. The first houses of one's own village—were they nothing? She was there at last. A moment or two more against the wind, and she would be standing just below the two little huts, where Elias perhaps already had gone to bed, but where he nevertheless still was and waited—where

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he had waited all those long years. "Who's that?" he would ask, when she knocked. And she would answer . . . ah, she had had her words ready for many years. "Elias!" she would reply, in a voice new and warm, "Elias, it is me."

But ah!—there were people actually up yet. A form came down from one of the cluster of cottages, which had a light in the chamber window. Some one was ill no doubt. Perhaps one of her old friends, about to pass away to-night. Alas—what if most of those of her own age were alive no longer? Would she be lonely perhaps? No—she had Elias, and she had the two tiny houses below—her home.

The form which came down from the little hut was also that of a woman, wrapped in a large shawl. She paused, startled to see people out on the highway so late at night. The stranger paused likewise. The two stared at each other in the pale moonlight. The other came on down, opened the wicket, and emerged on the road. The stranger stood waiting till they were quite near each other. Then she tried to smile. The other stopped short and drew back. For a moment they were silent.

"Good evening, Randi!" the stranger said.

"Heaven help me! Is it . . . !"

"Yes, it's me."

Johan Bojer

"Oh, I was almost frightened! Well, of all things . . . !"

"You thought it was a ghost perhaps."

"But, Sara, is it really you?"

"Yes, it's really me."

They had to speak loud because of the wind. From underneath her shawl Randi stretched forth a hand which Sara took. Both hands were old and bony.

"And so you're coming home! God bless you—you're really coming home again!"

"Yes, and you're still alive, too, Randi!"

"Ah, yes, but we're getting old now."

"True, so we are."

They started to walk together against the wind. Long shadows of the two forms followed them over the fields.

"But, tell me—you mustn't be offended, Sara, at my asking—but wasn't it . . . ?"

"For life? Yes. But I was pardoned finally."

"Ah, so. The Lord is strange. Well, well—to think that we should see you again!"

"And Elias—how is he?"

"Ah, Elias has nothing more to worry him!"

"So!" And Sara walked faster and drew her shawl tighter about her. She did not want to know more. Had Elias nothing to worry him? Without her? Surely he couldn't have got a divorce and perhaps married some other woman!

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No—she did not want to know more. She would go and see for herself.

Meanwhile Randi walked by her side and grew more and more embarrassed. For it was she who had gone—at the time—to the midwife and had intimated that all had not been as it should be with the child that had died up there at Sletten. And the midwife had had her own misgivings about it. The result was that the two had gone to the bailiff together. There had been a hearing—several hearings—and the child had been exhumed, and the doctor had come with his instruments and journal. It had ended by Sara's confessing the whole thing, and Helga, the foster daughter, the mother of the little child, had confessed likewise, but she had received only seven years. The older woman it was who had been the instigator of the terrible deed, and she was sentenced for life. But Elias, the short bandy-legged husband, had grasped nothing whatever, and he had been found innocent. When the officers finally came to take the two women away, he had paced about in the little cottage, from one window to the next, and had wept like a little child.

"Well, good night!" said Randi, as she paused where the road turned down to her home.

Sara struggled on against the wind alone. She did not want to ask any more questions—she

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would see for herself. She already glimpsed the tiny houses ahead, and her heart began to beat—in a moment she would be there . . .

She was seventy now, and still she dreamed of a new life. She would atone for everything and be kind and wonderful to Elias. For it was not the evil deed she had done penance for that had tormented her most these fifteen years. It was all the meanness she had inflicted on Elias through long, long periods. All the scolding and bossing she had done if he but appeared in the doorway, all the miserable food she had forced him to eat, all the poisonous discord she had filled their home with early and late—all these things she wanted to live long enough to atone for. That was why she had—as a kind of salvation for her poor soul—longed to get home. And that was why she had implored the Lord to grant her a long life—that she might atone and pay off everything—every last bit.

Ah, she would labor with her old hands, and mend his clothes, and give him good food, and never again cook strong coffee for herself on the sly and mere wash for him. She would go with him out to the peat bogs and help carry and haul. The home she would keep spick and span always; gossip should never cross her lips, and throughout the entire parish it should be said that they lived happily together, and that Sara

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was a new person, indeed, an example for old and young alike.

God bless the tiny houses—for there they were! But ah—how small the cottage seemed. The moon played on the two windows towards the west, but behind them there was no light. Elias no doubt had gone to bed. Had he by chance some one to help him, or was he living alone and patiently waiting for her?

But what was that? Again she opened her eyes wide. Why—there was only the cottage left. The tiny barn was gone. Had he rid himself of the cow and the sheep?

And as she stood thus puzzled her old eyes began to stare outright. For over on what had been the field stood two other buildings, a cottage and a barn, but somewhat larger than the old. They almost seemed to betoken a new prosperity. Was it Elias who had managed all this—or—?

At any rate she could not stand thus on the highway in the wind and the cold; she would have to go on. But it seemed to her now as if the tiny hut, her old home, lay lonely and deserted, and no longer bid her welcome home. What could have happened?

As she staggered up the familiar path to the old cottage, her shadow stretched far ahead of her. Her skirts and her shawl fluttered in the

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wind. It must be a cold night, for the chills ran strangely down her back. There had been only a narrow path between the cottage and the barn in the old days, and the hard ground had echoed under foot with a metallic ring. Now, as she walked, her steps sounded dead and frozen in the night.

Outside the door on the other side there was no bucket, as in the old days, no spruce boughs for one's feet, no sign whatever that any one lived within. Nevertheless she took hold of the familiar latch, and the door actually opened. But no one asked, "Who is that?" She had no need to say, "Elias . . . it is me."

She entered the little hallway—ah, the odor was still the same old odor. Welcome home, Sara! Cautiously she fumbled her way through the door to the living room. Within, straight across the floor, the moon outlined two windows, but she could hear no breathing as of one who slept. There was not even a bed, or a table, or chairs. No clock ticked on the wall. Was Elias dead? Oh God—what if Elias were no longer alive?

She went into the kitchen on the right, the only other room in the cottage besides the living room and the hall. Here, too, a moon-window lay outlined on the floor, but otherwise it was quite empty. No kettle, no pot, no cup in the

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cupboard, no platters in the rack on the wall. The house was dead. No one lived in it now.

She sank down beside the open hearth. Then it was true after all—Elias had passed away. And there was no one of her own to whom she could turn. She had visions of the poor house—and all the evil eyes—"That's the murderess!" And she who had dragged herself home on her old feet, as her only hope of salvation—only to have it turn out perhaps the greatest curse of all.

"And you, Elias—you would not wait! I shall never have a chance to be good to you. Oh Lord, have mercy on my poor soul!"

A strange weariness seized her, and she collapsed and closed her eyes. What did she want here! What did she want here!

She heard footsteps outside and raised her head slowly. Some one entered, went into the living room first, and then opened the door to the kitchen. Elias? No—it was old Randi again.

"It seemed a shame to leave you alone, Sara. I saw you go in here."

"Tell me, is Elias dead?"

"Don't you know what has happened?"

"I know nothing."

"Elias is living over in the other cottage now."

"Is . . . is he married?"

"No, he is a pensioner. He has turned over

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the place to a newly married couple, and they have put up new buildings."

"Has . . . has he turned over the place?"

She raised her eyes towards the other and breathed heavily.

"I thought you knew it. And now, I suppose, you'll have to move over and live with them, too."

"With strangers! And we—Elias and I—we are not to have our own home!"

She shivered as if she were cold. The dream of the new life—for the two of them—in the old home, with their cow and sheep and a chicken or two—the dream burst. Elias had somehow become another person. She swayed back and forth, stared straight ahead at the window, and breathed deeply and heavily.

Randi came up and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"You mustn't take it so hard, Sara. Elias—poor fellow—couldn't work any longer. He had to do as he did. No one thought that you would return."

"Listen, Randi—would you go and fetch Elias?"

"Here! But, dear me, hadn't you better go down to him—where there are people? You're freezing, and you need something to eat, too. And there is neither bed here nor bedding. It

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is far into the night. You had better come along and get some sleep."

"Will you go and bring Elias here? I'll never in the wide world go to strangers."

"Well, of course, if you insist. He's gone to bed, no doubt, but . . . of all things! Good Lord! Good Lord!"

Her steps died away, and Sara sat motionless on the flagstone beside the hearth, staring straight ahead. In the roof and the chimney the north wind howled, but she continued to sit on and did not notice that she shivered in the cold. Here she was then at last. In her old home again. The new life—ah yes—the new life! Her body swayed back and forth—back and forth.

* * *

The young people lay asleep in the other cottage on what had been the field, and they woke up with a start when the outer door jerked open in the wind and some one fumbled her way in.

"Is it you, Randi! What's the trouble?"

"I must speak with Elias! Oh, Lord, what a time!"

And the old woman crossed the floor, and went into the chamber, where the pensioner lay.

They could hear them talking. The old fellow no doubt thought he was dreaming. And when he finally emerged with Randi, he said to the

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young people, as he trudged across the floor and went out, "Well, of all things!"

"What is it?"

"Sara has come home."

"Here?"

"Yes, she's over in the cottage!"

Long after the footsteps had died away in the night the two young people sat bolt upright in their bed and stared at each other. Sara, the murderess—the old spectre they remembered from the time they were children—the evil one himself, disguised as a woman—come home! Did she mean to settle down here! Would they have to provide for her too as well as the old man! Were they under any such obligation? Was there anything about that in the contract? No—never in the wide world. The old man was to be kept as long as he lived—true. But there was not a word about Sara. And Sara they would never—never—admit into their home.

But meanwhile she was over in the cottage. What in heaven's name was to be done with her?

They were unable to sleep. They expected any moment to hear her come. They would have to keep her for the night at any rate. But no longer. Not one day longer—never!

Outside the moon shone bright and clear, and the north wind had somewhat abated, but the

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hollow droning from the sea kept up like the rumble of a distant organ.

The little old fellow trudged along with Randi, their nearest neighbor, in the moonlight, over the fields to the tiny cottage, his old home. He turned his feet out, and he walked as if he strutted and swung a cane, a habit he had learned from the justice at Lindegaard. But he thought all the time he was dreaming. Sara, who had been as dead to him these many years now—Sara, who had been incarcerated for life—surely she was gone forever. He had for some time now looked upon himself as a widower. But there she was, nevertheless, in the cottage. He was to see her again. And old memories awakened. Peace had finally come to his home after she had left—peace of mind to him too. No one had scolded and stormed, and he had been carefree and happy. And then—then she bobs up again! What in heaven's name was he now to do?

He slackened his gait and breathed heavily and looked about for an escape. It had been such a relief to him to move away from the old cottage, where he had been maltreated and tormented, and where the evil deed had been committed. Indeed, at night, when it was dark, he preferably made long detours around the hut to escape it, and at the earliest opportunity he meant to have it torn down. But Sara—Sara had risen up as from the

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grave itself! And there—there she was sitting and waiting and wanted to be his wife again and start carrying on as before. God help us—surely he was dreaming!

“Well, good night!” Randi, his neighbor, said. For no doubt it seemed best to her that man and wife be left alone together.

But he shuddered and shivered when he found himself alone and opened the door to enter.

The little living room was empty. He surveyed the walls and the floor. Would she rise up through the floor like a ghost, or issue forth from the oven like a witch? He coughed with a wheezing in his chest as of asthma.

“Any one here?”

The house echoed the sound clearly, but no one answered. He proceeded towards the kitchen, but was afraid something or other might happen behind his back. He opened the door and thrust his head through. There beside the hearth sat some dark form, and it stirred, but did not rise. He ventured all the way in, but what he most wanted to do was to flee. Then he distinguished a pale face within the shawl and a pair of eyes which he recognized.

“Is it . . . !”

He got no further.

A moment elapsed before the answer came.

“Yes, Elias . . . it is me.”

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There was another silence. They could hear each other breathe.

"Good evening, Elias!"

She now rose and extended a white bony hand, which he was compelled to take.

"Well, is it you, Sara? Hm—good evening."

His throat tightened. After all they had been man and wife once.

"How are you, Elias?"

Her voice was new, solicitous, tender.

"Oh, one day as well as the next. And you?"

He did not bid her welcome. He merely stood staring at her—did not dare, as it were, come too near.

"Well, here I am, Elias!" she said finally.

"Yes, so I see. But you must come along to the folks."

The north wind sang in the roof and the chimney. She stood as before in the pale moonlight, and had not yet loosened her shawl. Was she ready to leave again?

"If you want me again, Elias, it'll have to be you who'll move here?"

"Here! But that is utterly impossible."

"Oh, I guess the hut is ours yet, isn't it? And haven't you a bed and a table—enough so that we can begin anew?"

"Here! Anew! Huh! Don't you know what has happened?"

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"Dear Elias, you mustn't say no. We must begin anew—here—as in the old days!" her voice pleaded with him.

"It is utterly impossible, Sara!"

"Oh, Elias, you must not be so hard. I have done so much wrong. I must have a chance to undo it. We'll manage to get along all right—here—just we two."

Never had he imagined that her voice could be so tender.

"I believe you're beside yourself, Sara," he had to answer nevertheless. "Can't you see it's utterly impossible?"

"Impossible!"—She came nearer. "Will you never forgive me, Elias?"

He passed his hand over his forehead and looked towards the window.

"It's not that, Sara. But what are we to live on?"

"But we can work and strive, can't we, as well as we are able to! Ah, I shall not shirk my part, Elias!"

"We are both over seventy now. And I no longer have the place. The young folks are not obliged to support you, and so—so it would be the poorhouse for both of us."

"Well, when we are no longer able to take care of ourselves, I suppose the poorhouse can help us, as it does so many others. But surely

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we can live together at any rate. You move in here, Elias, and you'll see we'll get along and be happy."

She saw by the aid of the moonlight that his face became terrified at the thought of moving over and living with her again. He was seized with a chill and shuddered violently, and she was terrified at the sight. Ah, had the gulf between them then grown so wide that no prayers ever could bridge it?

"Where do you mean to go, Sara? I'm afraid the young folks have enough with me."

"I have this cottage."

"Surely you don't intend to settle down here. We haven't as much as a bed or a chair to spare."

"I'll settle here!" she said, as she seated herself by the hearth again. "The cottage is mine. Half of it at any rate is mine."

"Huh! But I've sold the cottage, Sara. The young folks own it now. And it is to be torn down shortly."

"What? You sold the cottage?"

"Yes," he said.

"But—but me then?"

"You! You were in the workhouse!"

His words came like a blow. He sensed the gathering storm in her voice. But this time he refused to be browbeaten.

"And you sold our home because you thought

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I was out of the way for good? You sold what was mine. And now—now you show me the door.”

“That isn’t my fault, Sara!”

“Oh, you’re a fool—that’s what. You always were a fool.”

“And you—what are you?”

They were well on the way to tearing each other’s hair again. She felt the tragedy of it, rose, and compelled herself to entreat him once more.

“You won’t drive me away, Elias! You wouldn’t do that, would you?”

“No, but the cottage isn’t mine, can’t you see. I have told you I haven’t any longer a home for you.”

She passed her hand over her eyes and sighed.

“Then I suppose it’s best I go away again.”

“Where will you go?”

“There’s the fjord, I suppose. I can drown myself.”

“Nonsense! Come with me over to the young folks. They’ll give you shelter for the night at any rate, and to-morrow we can consider how we can best help you.”

“No, Elias—it wasn’t for that that I came here. It was to get you back again and my home.”

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"That is too late now," he said, as he made a move to go.

"Well, over to the young folks, Elias, I'll never in the wide world go!"

"But you can't stay here to-night."

She held her folded hands towards him and begged for the last time.

"Please, Elias—move over here. Do you hear? Give me a chance to start life anew. Otherwise I can never save my poor soul!"

And with that she was exhausted. She was exhausted from the trip, from the excitement, and from the great disappointment. She began to sob, and sank down beside the hearth again with her face in her hands.

He went up to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Come, Sara, let's go over to the folks."

She dried her tears.

"No, Elias, to strangers you will have to go without me."

"But I have told you you can't stay here."

"I will stay. I'll stay at least to-night. This is my home. To-morrow I can leave."

He talked—he tried to coax her and threaten her. She merely swayed back and forth and stared straight ahead.

"I'll stay here to-night," she kept repeating, "I'll stay here to-night. This is my home."

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At length he recollected the old days and became angry. If she wanted to act like a vixen and sit there in the cold winter night merely to plague him—why, that was her affair. He was going, and if she didn't want to come along to the folks, she would have to sit there.

"It didn't do any good to talk to her!" he explained to the young folks, as he came in and crossed the floor to his chamber. "Just like her! Hasn't changed a bit! She means to stay there to-night."

The young wife deplored that she had not one bit of bedding to send over to her. He would have to fetch her over for the night at least.

"Never!" the little fellow hissed, and went into his chamber.

He knew her from experience. There was no use talking to her.

But the young people lay sleepless the rest of the night. What might the sinister woman be up to? The young wife begged her husband to go over and see, but she changed her mind instantly—that empty hut was no place to go to in the thick of the night, when Sara was there. No, she would not let him go.

The huge clock on the wall ticked away. It had hung in the old cottage, and Sara had wound it many a time. It began to strike—one-two-

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three strokes—as if it cried out into the night and implored her to come over.

But the hours went by, and no footsteps were heard. The old man had gone to bed again and had wrapped himself up against the cold. Of course it was all a dream. At any rate he would never move over and live with Sara again.

* * *

Outside the moonlight had turned gray, for the heavens had become overcast. And when the wind began to blow again towards daybreak, huge woolly masses of clouds came rolling in over Blaahæia from the sea. Winter had set in for good. In the morning the village would awaken to snow flurries and whitened fields.

But over in the little cottage Sara had settled herself in the very place in the corner where the bed had stood in the old days. She lay stretched out on the cold, bare floor, and her feet were wet after the long trudge from the steamship dock. But she gathered her skirts and her shawl closer about her and placed her little bundle underneath her head. She had finally come home again.

The stove stood up against the wall and stared at her. She had fired it and cooked her coffee on it many a time in the old days. Now it asked coldly, "What is it you really want here?"

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And there she had sat and tended the tiny baby once. The baby! Ugh!

But although she closed her eyes as if afraid to see it, she could at any rate not avoid hearing it.

It set up a whining over in the corner by the stove.

Oh, this sound!

And Elias, the old fool, who had ever been full of stuff and nonsense, came in, and she threw her slipper at his head, and swore and stormed. Get out—you! We haven't a bite to eat in the house! Out, I say—I can't stand the sight of you! And she knew well enough that by now he must be tired and that there were both food and milk in the house. But he turned about and left. Ugh! She turned to the wall and shuddered in the cold.

And Helga, her foster daughter, came in, pale, youthful, innocent. "Run along to the village and get yourself a man!" she yelled to her. "You are old enough now to provide us with a son-in-law, or are you such a scarecrow perhaps that no young man would look at you!"

But when Helga one day came to grief, there was another story. The baby was a disgrace to them all. The baby had to be got rid of. Then people in time would forget all about it. Listen—the child whimpers—but it must be got rid of!

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She rolled over on the cold floor and groaned.

Ah, was it not peace and atonement she had sought when she trudged her way hither? And it turned out to be merely a day of judgment. Here she lay, tortured by the cold and by spooks—was this the beginning of the place where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth?

Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, poor sinner!

It began to grow warm finally. It began to grow real warm and cozy. At last it grew so hot that she struggled as if to cast off unnecessary bed covers.

If there had not been so many ugly faces leering at her in the room! But now they forgot—gathered—all those she had belied—all those she had filched tobacco and shillings from—all those she had loaded with abuse and vituperation down through the long years. They kept coming and coming. They stared at her through the windows too. They were all there—all of them. This was the day of judgment.

And it was too late to atone. She was too old to set anything right again. It was too late.

Elias, Elias—can't you forgive me!

But Elias had gone. It was too late.

Lord Jesus—have mercy on my soul!

There were other faces now staring in at the windows. The stove took on life and began to talk. The room became filled with people who

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wanted revenge. She raised herself in an effort to get away, but she was too exhausted and sank down again. There was the tramp of many feet outside. A multitude of people came, and they all wanted to judge and enter complaint. Lord! Lord . . . !

Until she realized that a stranger had entered. He forced his way through, and the others fell back and stared at him. It was a young man with a slight beard. He stretched forth his hand, and his voice was kindness itself.

“Arise, Sara! And go away—and sin no more!”

Meanwhile the moon had completely disappeared in the night, and occasional snow flurries had begun to whirl about in the north wind. When the gray winter morning dawned at last, the forests and the hills lay covered with white blankets of snow, and here and there the wind reared up specters in the air, which whirled away whistling till they struck some house or fence and collapsed. Up past Blaaheia, in front of the low mountains towards the west, the fjord came rolling, black beneath the flurries of snow, and tried to imitate the droning it had heard far out at sea.

The young people and Elias had not slept, and now they went trudging one after the other

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through the snow with a lantern in front to look to her who sat in the old cottage and shivered.

The driving snow had drifted through the cracks in the walls of the gray cottage, and at the door the young wife paused. She did not want to go in first, nor did her husband, although he was a giant among men. And so Elias pulled himself together, took the lantern, and went in first.

"Have . . . have you taken to the floor, Sara!" he stammered, as he held his light towards the long bundle over by the wall.

There was no answer. He went nearer and held up his light. The old woman lay with her hands folded over her breast. Her eyes were wide open.

"What does this mean?" he stammered. And the two young folk came up and stood staring. The old man bent down.

"Ah, so that's it!" he said finally, as he placed the lantern on the floor.

Old Randi came and washed the corpse, and Elias, who was a handy man, began to build the coffin himself.

When she lay stretched out on a door, which had been placed over two barrels, attired in white linen, her wisps of white hair neatly braided, the old fellow was called in. And he came,

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his face warm from activity—and there they stood, the young folk, Randi, and the stocky husband, his legs apart, his feet pointing out.

“Do you remember how pretty she was—at one time?” Randi asked him.

“Oh, yes—she was pretty enough—there was nothing lacking on that score.”

The young wife brought out a little bundle she had discovered in the corner. She opened it, and they all watched her. There was a little comb, a cracked hand mirror, a couple of handkerchiefs, a change of linen, a pair of stockings. And there was also a little pocketbook, with a brass snap, which Elias recognized from old days. The young wife handed it to him, and he opened it. There was money. Some kroner in silver—and—of all things!—some bills also. No doubt earnings of some sort or another which she had saved during the long years she was away—in case she should one fair day come north again to her home.

“A shilling or two may come in handy for tobacco,” the young wife said.

“So they may!” Elias’s face lit up and he stuck the purse in his pocket.

GABRIEL SCOTT

NILS PUNCTUAL AND HIS CLOCKS,

GABRIEL SCOTT (1874-) has been described as one of the very few writers in Norway who have successfully cultivated the idyl. The book by which he first showed his full powers as a writer is, however, not an idyl, but a stark tragedy, *Ordeal by Fire. The Story of Jan Vibe* (1915). It describes how two young girls suspected of murder die at the hands of the executioner. The event takes place in the early part of the nineteenth century, and the story in this book, as well as in its sequel *The Life of Enck Ruben. A Saga of Patriotism*, is told in the form of a chronicle by an old sexton.

The Fountain, a Letter about the Fisherman Marcus is the story of a poor fisherman who, living alone in his little cottage without even wife or child to share his life, occupied with his humble work and his simple pleasures, finds the wellspring of contentment in his own soul. Without being in the slightest way an imitation, it is akin to Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* in its apotheosis of humble productive toil, but in Gabriel Scott the source of contentment is religious. A similar spirit is present in *The Path. Christopher with the Twig*, the story of a poor, deformed herdsboy and his life with his sheep on the high mountain plateau. *The Golden Gospel* is a fairy tale in book form, describing humorously how Our Lord and St. Peter visited the earth and what they saw there.

Gabriel Scott lives near Arendal, and his characters are nearly always from the coast strip and skerries of southern Norway. Their type is well exemplified by *Nils Punctual*.

Gabriel Scott

NILS PUNCTUAL AND HIS CLOCKS

IF ANY one had asked some years ago, "Who is the most punctual and the most precise person in the village?" the answer could hardly have been doubtful.

"The old man at Plankemyr, of course!"—Nils Punctual, as he was called, for surely his like never existed in this wide world before or since.

Nils Punctual had his home filled with clocks. It would be no exaggeration to say that he had nigh unto half a hundred of them all told—there were standing clocks and hanging clocks, round clocks and octagonal clocks, striking clocks and cuckoo clocks, clocks of all sizes, large and small. They could be found ticking away in every room in the house. One could hear them even from the highway—indeed, a stranger passing might have thought there were beehives in the neighborhood. And every day precisely at twelve o'clock noon Nils Punctual appeared, his spectacles on his nose and a bunch of keys in his hand, and took his bearings from the sun and went the rounds, inspecting and regulating. He addressed each

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one separately, as he proceeded, and made notations on a bit of paper if anything was wrong.

"Hoho! You're in a hurry to-day, I see!" he might say to the parlor clock. "But that we'll have none of, for haste makes waste, I want you to understand, and—accordingly we'll just lengthen the pendulum a little!"

"Aha, so you're lagging behind in the race of time," he might exclaim, if the next, perhaps, was a little slow. "Or is it oiling you need? But there's no oil to be had to-day—accordingly we'll just shorten the pendulum!"

If now and again one of them happened to be correct, he was enormously pleased, and then it was a delight to hear him.

"Ah, right on the dot!" he would say, and nod to the clock. "You are a joy to my heart—a worthy example for the world to follow. For you are punctual, and that is the thing that matters!"

Nils Punctual was married but had no children. That was, to tell the truth, largely the reason why he had first come to concern himself with clocks, for he liked to have some one around he could talk to and tend. And once having begun, he was unable to give them up again. Besides, children cost a great deal. They had to be fed, and they had to have clothes, and perhaps they ran off and took ill or were drowned, and they were at all events very difficult to regulate. Clocks, on

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the contrary, were quite tractable. They remained put where one placed them, and never ran away from home. If anything ailed them, he did not have to send for the doctor, but could oil them and regulate them himself. In this way Nils Punctual had little by little come to have something of an asylum for clocks. It was largely old infirm wrecks that he took unto himself, such as people were unwilling to go to the trouble and expense of repairing, which he therefore got for a song. But however it all hung together—no sooner had Nils Punctual taken them home than they began to come to life. They struck the hours and sawed away as though nothing had ever ailed them in the slightest! How he did it people could never fathom, and when they asked and inquired and sought to find out, the answer was almost always the same.

“ ’Tis with clocks as with people—they too need company!”

Well, in this way Nils Punctual had lived many long years, until he had almost become a sort of clock himself. His whole household ran on schedule. He rose in the morning at six and went to bed at nine in the evening. He ate dinner at twelve-thirty and drank his afternoon coffee at four-thirty. He lit his morning pipe at exactly eleven o'clock and his afternoon pipe at exactly five o'clock. Once every minute he spat,

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and he exhaled the smoke every third second. At length he knew the time without knowing what time it was.

His outward appearance reinforced the general impression.

His left arm hung suspended like a weight and his right oscillated like a pendulum. And when he spoke, it was in frequent slight staccatoes, like the ticking of a clock.

How long such a human clock can run it is not easy to say. It depends on so many things—whether it is tended properly, whether it is dry or too oily, whether it is overhauled occasionally, and what kind of works it had to begin with. Some can keep running for a hundred years, others hold out scarcely thirty—it varies quite considerably. Nils Punctual managed to run upwards of sixty. The works were by that time so worn that he had to take to his bed, and it was not long before he and others understood that the end was not far off.

But Nils Punctual did not on that account give up regulating!

When he realized he would never again leave his bed, he had all the clocks brought into his room. They stood placed about so thick that one could scarcely move around. Then from his bed, where he lay, he issued his orders.

Gabriel Scott

"Turn the Mora clock in the corner one minute ahead!"

"Don't let the octagonal get too much sun—otherwise the oil will melt, and she will run riot!"

"Turn the Bornholmer clock two minutes back and raise the weight up when you wind it!"

"Let the watch on the shelf change places with the one on the nail, for the one on the nail can't stand the draft!"

Those who took care of him had little time for anything except the clocks, running back and forth, moving and tending them. But in that way he did attain the strictest punctuality till the very last. The end, however, was not long in coming. One evening he besought his wife to take good care of his comrades when he was gone, and then early that same night, just as the first clock began to strike eleven, his heart ceased to tick. He lay peacefully in the midst of his clocks, a smile playing around his mouth, as though it were the heavenly harmony he was listening to. . . .

From that very moment the reign of punctuality was at an end at Plankemyr. The clocks were taken out and returned to their original places, where one after another they gradually came to a stop. And the two that still were tended could never agree on the time. One showed six o'clock, when the other showed seven. Finally there was only the sun left to go by. It

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was all so strange—the hand that had tended them and fondled them all these years was gone. . . .

One evening the good widow happened to be sitting in one of the rooms sewing or knitting. The house was all quiet and still; only the lamp buzzed a little. Suddenly it seemed to her that one of the clocks in the side chamber began to go. A little later a second one, too, started to go, and shortly others, till the whole house fairly echoed with ticking and clicking.

The widow sat listening for some time, wondering whether she had heard right, but when the ticking continued she opened the door to the room and raised her lamp to investigate.

There—sure enough—the clocks stood ticking away, as if in sheer delight—the Mora clock and the Bornholmer, the octagonal, and the little one on the shelf. The pendulums swung back and forth—she could see the glint in the case every time they swung past the glass. At the same moment she heard something burr behind her. She turned right about—even the parlor clock had joined them.

The widow began to think there must be something strange underneath all this, and finally ran out and called in the neighbor. But that did not help matters any. No sooner had the neighbor entered the door than the clocks all took to strik-

Gabriel Scott

ing the hour. And, what is more, they all struck very punctually, in perfect unison, and sent the music fairly ringing through the house. And just as the last stroke rang out, the cuckoo clock in the chamber loft started in.

“Cuckoo! Cuckoo!”

It sounded almost as if some one were laughing and chuckling and having a good time all by himself. The neighbor did not linger any longer; he snatched his hat and made for the door.

“Excuse me!” he exclaimed as he rushed out, “This is something I’d rather not meddle with. You’ll have to straighten it out for yourself!”

But to straighten out spooks is easier said than done—especially when they are of the punctual kind.

Nothing the good wife undertook to do was of any avail. One thing had as little effect as another. Things were as they were. Whether she stayed in with them, or left them and went out, the cursed clocks still kept on going. Whether she read Johan Arent and Linderot’s sermons, or sang hymns from Hauge’s hymnal—they ticked and chattered away as merrily as ever.

After two or three days the poor widow had quite given up. By that time she had tried all sorts of things, had fumigated with juniper, and had made the sign of the cross on the doors, but all equally to no avail. The house became per-

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fectly unlivable at last—the clocks struck the hours and ticked away the seconds night as well as day. They sawed away and clicked and ticked and struck in every last corner—it was worse than the worst tattoo.

It was not long, of course, before the whole village knew that Nils Punctual was still busy regulating. For that the wife was in great part responsible, for she ran about from gaard to gaard and sought advice and delivered long tirades against her husband. He fussed around all night long, she said, and tugged at the weights and moved the hands—there was never a moment's rest to be had. The cabinet doors opened and shut, opened and shut, the stairs creaked, and the floor echoed with footsteps. Not that she ever saw him of course, but she could hear the rattle of his keys, so that it was not difficult to know who it was. She had finally placed leaves from the hymnal inside the clocks and buried a Bible underneath the door sill, but that had availed as little as the rest.

"Have you tried regulating them yourself?" some one at last happened to ask her.

No, that she had never tried.

"Well, what can you expect then? For the clocks were surely the dearest things he had!"

The good wife began speculating, and already that very night she went the rounds with her

Gabriel Scott

lamp and wound the clocks and inspected them. And whether one will believe it or not—from that moment the house quieted down. To be sure, she heard now and again some fussing over near the Mora clock; but that had always been so difficult to get just right anyway,—it was no great wonder that Nils Punctual himself had to lend a hand there.

Otherwise she saw no further signs of him. But when the Mora clock was sold at auction the year she died, the purchaser insisted that he had got Nils Punctual himself in the bargain. He stood upright, he said, inside the clock, and peered out through a hole in the dial, and saw to it that everything went precisely so. If there was something that did not quite tally, he took to pounding and rummaging around on the inside, until in some strange way or another it straightened itself out.

In the long run, of course, Nils turned out to be something of a nuisance, and accordingly the owner took and buried the clock in the ground.

Ever since, it is said, Nils Punctual runs back and forth between his coffin and the Mora clock, and can never quite make up his mind in which one to lie.

OLAV DUUN

AT CHRISTMAS

OLAV DUUN (1876-) is the only dialect writer in Norway at present who has won a national and, more recently, even an international reputation. He is a schoolteacher in Namdalen, in northern Trøndelagen, and he never allows his characters to stray far from the region he knows so intimately. Though he writes of unlearned peasants, they are far from being unsophisticated. Indeed Duun has been compared with Ibsen in his treatment of the problems that rise from the complication of opposing forces. The comparison might be extended to his dialogue which, in its curt crispness, carries, like that of Ibsen, meaning within meaning.

Duun's chief work is a cycle of six novels called after the title of the first, *The Juvikings*. It traces the fortunes of a peasant family for many generations. In the first we have "the old fellows," rough fighters who fear neither men nor devils. In *Blind* the hero is the magnificent but still primitive Blind-Anders. In *The Great Wedding* we see the disintegration of the family, but it rises again in the person of Odin, Blind-Anders's great-grandson, whose fortunes are told in the three last volumes, *Fairyland*, *Youth*, and *The Storm*. Odin makes himself a leader in the parish by virtue of his fine, clean idealism. His voluntary death in *The Storm* to save his faithless friend marks the final evolution from the heathen savagery of the old Juvikings. In *Blind-Anders's Stories* Duun has collected a group of stories that are purported to be told by Blind-Anders in his old age, when the family gathers around the hearth in winter evenings. Much of their charm is due to the air of the folk tale which is maintained throughout. It is from these stories we have taken *At Christmas*.

Olav Duun

AT CHRISTMAS

FROM BLIND ANDERS'S STORIES

THERE are other people at Moholmen now. When I was a boy, the man who had the place was named Gabriel. Moholmen had been in the family, had come down from father to son, from times immemorial. It was reputed a sizable gaard, and a good gaard, and Gabriel was very well off. One could see that he was aware of it, but otherwise he was as square and upright a fellow as you'd find for miles around. And he was well married, with three daughters, but no son. Massi was the eldest daughter—it is of her I am going to tell you. She was both pretty and good. I was only a lad at the time, but I remember her well. She was tall and straight, so fair of hue and kindly of eye that one was tempted to linger and look after her whenever she went by—and there were many who did so. When the young folks were together, and had no fiddler, they often got her to tra-la-la the dance, for she had a fine voice and was always merry and light-hearted. When she came, she always put life in the party, even if she said little or nothing.

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At Nesstrand, right across from Moholmen, you can still see the sites of old houses. A crofter lived there at the time, Andreas by name. He was of a freeholder family, from Ness, and he always managed pretty well; but, as I say, other than crofter he was not, and at that time the herring had not yet come, to make the crofter equal with the freeholder. He had a son called Tarald; it was an old name in the family, and, as it happened, all who had borne it were fellows who had made something of themselves. He was of an age with Massi. What she saw in him I don't know, nor did any one else; he was only one among many. But it was him she wanted. Others who offered themselves she merely laughed at. Massi and Tarald betrothed themselves, people said, but every time he suggested going to her father and asking for her, she lost courage.

"It's no use, I'm afraid," she said. "We'll have to wait."

"I have waited long enough and then some, it seems to me," Tarald pleaded.

"And does he wait too long who waits for something good?" she laughed. Massi always laughed most when matters were worst.

"But I'm not made to wait," he protested.

"Nor I either," she answered, and added, "but for you I could wait twenty years."

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She told her mother she wanted to marry Tarald of Nesstrand. The mother was angry and upbraided her; she had better not try any such nonsense in that house! The girl went to her father, but he merely laughed at her, as one laughs at a child who wants to trade his silver shilling away for a copper. Massi said no more, not even to Tarald, but he must have understood it, nevertheless, although he said nothing. One evening he rowed over the inlet, went straight up to Moholmen, and asked for Gabriel. He found him in the house. Almost all the help were present, but Tarald did not bite his lip on their account; he went straight to business and asked Massi's hand in marriage as if he were a real bigwig. It was deathly still in the room. Those who were present wished themselves elsewhere.

"Well, you haven't anything against it, have you?" asked Tarald.

Gabriel laid aside the boot he was patching. The sweat stood out on his brow.

"You don't really think you'll get my daughter, do you?" he asked.

"I shouldn't be here if I didn't," Tarald replied. "Maybe I'm not good enough—eh?"

"You don't know then that she is to have the gaard?" said Gabriel.

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"Oh yes, I do, and I have nothing against the gaard* either," Tarald replied.

At that point Massi broke in.

"We'll be glad to give up the gaard—if it's that that stands in the way. Anne and Marja can have it, can't they, Tarald?" Anne and Marja were her two sisters.

"That we might," he answered, "and yet again I don't know whether we should."

"You keep still and leave us!" Gabriel shot at Massi.

She went to the door slowly.

Then he got up and faced Tarald squarely.

"You worthless crofter, you! Come back and plunk down real money for the gaard,—then maybe there'll be another story. Then we'll talk business!"

The wife over on the bench coughed. She had great plans for Massi. But Gabriel repeated what he had said.

"And if you're any kind of a man you'll do it!" he added.

"Very well," Tarald said. "I'll take you at your word. Massi has vowed she will wait twenty years for me. I'll go away, and I'll come back

**Gaard* in this connection means a freeholder farm, carrying with it allodial rights. The gaard is indivisible and the one who takes it often has to buy out the other heirs. Between the crofter (tenant farmer) and the freeholder there is a deep gulf.

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too—by God, I will. Now we have sworn it—Tarald and I.”

With that he left the room. Massi wept, but the others stood firm. And Tarald went away.

He had hinted to Massi he might go to sea—that seemed to him the quickest way to get the money. One year after another went by, and never a word they heard from him. Her parents and people generally argued with her that she had better put him out of her mind. She merely laughed at them; it was a long time yet till the twenty years were up. The wooers grew weary at last and did not come back. She still went about with the young folk, and kept her courage up, but she was not so full of song as before.

Then one summer, at the Nærøy Fair, she met a young man who hailed from Sandøy, a light-hearted fellow, a pleasant chap to look at, and the best dancer at the fair. His name was Thor. How the two came to know each other is not told, but he said that he never would dance again for the rest of his life if he could not dance with her. And dance with her he did—all he wanted to. Gabriel and his wife were also present. They were delighted with her; she danced with all her old vim, and was just like herself again. They were pleased with the stranger too. Gabriel even made inquiries. Thor had not a little cash already, and a gaard in expectancy. People out

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his way had the reputation in those days of being wild and raw and a bit unmannered, but it was evident that Thor was not of their kind. It seemed almost certain there would be a betrothal, and a wedding, too, before very long, for Massi and he kept company. "In God's name, so be it," said the parents.

There would be no kicking over the traces there, people said. Yet when spring came Massi gave birth to a child.

It came so suddenly upon the Moholmens that they hardly knew which way to turn. It was rare in those days that a girl had a child; it was a tragedy. Gabriel journeyed over the Folla; he wanted to talk with Thor. But Thor was far up north fishing, and he was not likely to come home very soon—he was a wide traveling fellow. His parents talked kindly with Gabriel, and promised that there would be a wedding as soon as Thor came home, if it stood in their power.

"Well, that's the least you could do," said Gabriel.

But he had to cross the Folla a second time, and this time he saw Thor. No—Thor did not want to marry. Marriage he considered too serious a matter, and he had furthermore learned that the girl was engaged. For all that Gabriel pressed him, he got nowhere—they say he both begged and threatened. Thor was the stronger.

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He planked money down on the table, and compelled Gabriel to take it—it was for the child, he said.

Gabriel was worn to a shred when he returned home. It is said he took to his bed the better part of two days. He summoned Massi and asked her if she had brought this disgrace on him for spite. She assured him she had not. She had trusted Thor implicitly; she had been only too fond of him. With that she sat down and wept.

Then came the particular Christmas and the Christmas party that I want to tell you about. I was there myself. I was only sixteen or seventeen at the time, but I wasn't so little for all that. It was the week between Christmas and New Year, a Saturday evening. We were at Ness, three score or so of young folks, and were just talking of taking a trip over the inlet to see how the Moholmen girls were celebrating Christmas. One hinted that now it might soon pay to make Massi an offer of marriage. A second intimated he'd like to go up and take a good look at this youngster of hers—he had not seen him yet. So we sat and gabbled. Her child at the time might have been three years or so, and for three years they had seen little of Massi, although she bore her shame with a high head.

Then we noticed a boat row up the inlet and put in at the Moholmen boathouse. There were

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four strangers in it. They pulled the boat up carefully, and went on to the house. Some Christmas drams they must have had, from what we could see, and one carried an accordian. They were from the other side of Folla, we concluded. And then we, too, started.

The four proved to be from Sandøy—Thor and his brother and two other madcap fellows. They had been at a Christmas party, a dance somewhere, and now they came here. They wanted to drop in on old friends. It was Christmas, wasn't it? Gabriel was alone except for the hired man, who was not much of a fellow, and it was little use showing them the door. Nor was Thor the kind one could turn away. There was something likeable about him, so people said. Now he wanted to see his son. When we arrived, the Christmas ale had already been brought in, and the visitors were passing it round. They offered some to us too—a good holiday dram to each one, and a merry word to boot.

"You're not angry with me any longer?" asked Thor of Gabriel and his wife.

Neither answered. Thor looked at them perplexed. Then he turned to Massi.

"How about you—are you angry with me?"

Massi laughed; it was the first time in three years.

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"Well, I can't say that I am especially pleased with you."

"Well, but it's Christmas, isn't it!" he said. "And where is he? Our boy, I mean. You'll let me have a look at him surely?"

She turned red as a rose-haw as she went to fetch him. The youngster was exhibited before the whole room; he stood it well, although towards the last he was near crying.

"Oh, Massi, Massi, who'd ever think it of you!" laughed Thor, and drank her health.

There was another round of drinks, and afterwards still more. "More! More!" we laughed. It was Christmas in full swing, and Gabriel Moholmen was as if come to life again. One thing helped another, of course, but it was Massi especially that livened him up. For she had not been herself lately—hers had been a hard lot; but now she glowed like the morning sun on the mountain top.

"What sort of box is this?" she laughed, as she dragged out the accordion.

Such an accordion there were few of us had seen. She worked it out and in, as if she hardly knew it was made to play on, and all at once it began to sound. She had touched the keys with her fingers. The girls crowded round her. They tried it and laughed, they laughed and tried it

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again, and she who laughed most heartily was Massi.

The owner had to take it and show his art, and before we knew it we were dancing, every last one of us. For it was Christmas, and it was a long time between Christmas and Christmas in those days too. Other young folk came, and, as always happened, when the music sounded, we turned everything up side down at old Moholmen. And the one who was lightest of foot and whose laugh rang most gaily was Massi. Even old Gabriel himself had to take the floor with his wife. One madcap fetched the ale keg from the cellar; we placed it on the table, and tapped as we found time and were thirsty. Once or twice we stopped to get something to eat,—we had never had such a Christmas! Now and again we noticed that it was Thor who danced with Massi, or that she sat on his lap when they rested; but we forgot it the next instant.

“Now things are going as they should,” said Gabriel.

The sweat and the joy almost overcame him. Happy also were her two sisters; they were wonderfully light on their feet in the dance.

When we stopped at last, it was broad daylight outside. A glorious Sunday morning.

“It’s getting light, Gabriel Moholmen,” Thor called to Gabriel across the room.

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"That may be," said Gabriel.

"It's dawn for us too!" called Thor, who sat with Massi on his knee.

"I was thinking about that myself," laughed Gabriel.

Thor asked whether it was far to the minister. He meant to have the banns published that very Sunday.

"For Massi has grown prettier and prettier, and I believe I must take her home with me."

It was only a short stretch, Gabriel said. "We can reach the minister just in time."

"Is this one of the Sundays he preaches?" asked someone.

"It certainly is," answered Gabriel. "This, let me tell you, has all been foreordained. Get me something to eat, wife, and fetch me my Sunday clothes, and we'll be off. And get some breakfast for the whole company. It was written in the stars, this was. He who rules on high is mighty. Have you your papers with you, Thor?" he asked.

No, Thor did not have them,—he had not thought so far ahead. One or two of the guests looked up.

"Oh, I'll fix it somehow," Gabriel reassured him,—he was no small man. "It'll go through as if greased," he said. "I know the minister."

Four men rowed them over the bay and re-

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quested the publication of the banns. The minister interposed no obstacles. While they were gone, the rest of us danced with the bride, each in his turn.

Now there was a fellow there named Karl Kvingstad. He was an exceptionally comely fellow, of a freeholder family, though without any expectancy, and had frequently tried his luck with Massi. Gabriel's next oldest daughter was Anne. She was a thoroughly genuine person, and kind-hearted, people said, but, compared to Massi, not particularly pretty. She had scarcely had a single wooer, for it was Massi they all wanted. Karl Kvingstad thought quickly. No sooner had it become clear to him that it was Anne who would now get the gaard, than he drew her out in the hall and made her an offer. She accepted him on the spot, but they said nothing about it for the time being.

The festive table was decked again—sausages and collared beef and smoked mutton, the finest Christmas bread, butter and cheese and lefse, and aquevit and ale aplenty. Then we danced again. Massi was too happy to dance. She sat and talked with some of the girls as they sipped their glasses, and every now and then she looked out after those who had gone to the parson, for Thor was among them. Finally they came, their work accomplished. One of the girls said to her—she

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could be heard throughout the room—"To think that you should become so happy. You little dreamed it yesterday."

Massi laughed.

"No, I little dreamed it," she answered. "I only wished I would not live the year out. Now I wish I could wipe out that wish."

"But are you happy—deep in your heart?" asked the others.

"Yes, that I am. Except for one little thing."

"And what is that?" they demanded.

"It's this," she said, "I only wish *he* might see what's happening now. He who left me and never returned. I haven't heard a word from him!" She was so angry she trembled.

It was not certain that he was still alive, some suggested.

"I rather wish he were not," Massi answered. "Then I should not have to hate him. But I shouldn't object to his being here and seeing how happy I am. That joy I should not begrudge him," she added.

They did not wonder at that. Then we were all silent.

But not for long. A stranger entered, and there was soon something else to think about. He was a tall, bearded fellow in a blue suit, and a stranger in his whole manner. He greeted them, wished them a merry Christmas, and then simply

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stood and looked about the room. They invited him to come forward and be seated, but he seemed not to hear them. All at once Massi gave a little cry, and grew deathly pale. *She* had recognized him. It was Tarald. Then one after the other recognized him.

Thor went over to her quickly and supported her; she had all but fainted outright. He did not know what the trouble was.

Tarald went up and shook hands first with Gabriel and his wife, and then he approached Massi, but she sat rigid, her eyes glued fast to him.

"Who are you?" Thor asked.

"Well, who are you?" Tarald answered.

"I am Massi's husband-to-be," he answered.

"If you must know," he added.

"No, you're wrong there," said Tarald. "It is I am her husband-to-be. Come, Massi, your hand!"

Massi put her hand behind her. At length Gabriel had recovered his speech. He went up and put his hand on Tarald's shoulder and explained how matters stood.

"You stayed too long," he said. "There was none of us thought you were still alive."

Tarald looked at him and then at Massi.

"Yes, I stayed a long time. But I couldn't get ready sooner. You it was who set me the

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task, and Massi had promised to wait twenty years. I travelled fast homeward."

Gabriel answered it were best he said farewell and departed again whence he had come; it were best both for himself and these two.

"You have come too late, and there is nothing to be done about it," he said. "It isn't my fault."

Tarald stood silent for a moment. The others crowded around him and begged him to leave like a sensible fellow. Some of the men pressed him pretty hard,—they had had a good many drinks.

"Easy, folks, easy," he said, his eyes darkening. "You can't scare me, and you may as well know it."

There was among them a fellow who was very strong. He didn't think twice, but seized the stranger and heaved him out. But a moment later Tarald again stood in the doorway. He was still as calm as ever.

"I have been shown the door here once before," he said. "As yet only half the twenty years have gone, Massi, and here, Gabriel, here is the money for the gaard. Now speak up and say your say."

He drew forth a large purse with money,—it was almost all in gold. Then he called out over the heads of those who stood in front of him. "One thing I ask of you, Massi: that you have the banns annulled and take a fortnight to think things over."

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They all shouted "No!" to a man. They said his money was stolen money, and much that was worse. They were about ready to lay hold of him as a vagabond. But then they heard Massi behind them.

"I'll do as you say, Tarald," she said, "if that will give you any joy. I have waited so long already. But here's my child, that Thor is father to," she laughed.

"Yes, I see him," Tarald answered. "I'll be a good father to him,—you needn't worry about that. Even though it may not be so easy for me at first. Not one word of reproach from me shall you hear for what has happened. And this money is an honest man's money,—I believe you know that. I have both ventured and won."

Thor of Sandøy was a good natured fellow, and he was sure of Massi. He came forward and offered Tarald his hand.

"Well, all right then! And welcome home! After all we're grown men, aren't we? Shall we drink to his homecoming? And this other matter will surely straighten itself out."

To this they all loudly assented. Many of them were so relieved, they thought the roof of the house had been lifted. They drank to the stranger's homecoming and asked him to tell about his travels. That he would do some other time, he promised. He gave them only a few

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hints. He had scars both on his hands and on his face, and he admitted he had been up against all sorts of people. He had some fine things, both of silver and gold, and had travelled wide and far. "And now I am here," he concluded.

Gabriel had to go to the minister again,—he had scarce time to reach him before church. Whether he relished going or not no one knew, but his wife laughed.

"First we sigh for want of *one* man for Massi, and now we sigh because there are two. *Now* surely she's bound to be married."

She was fond of money, though a fine woman in other respects.

It was as good as a wedding that day at Moholmen. One continuous round of eating and drinking and dancing. Massi for the most part looked on, but when we cleared the room in the evening, she, too, joined in the dance. She danced with both suitors and with all of us, and she was gayer than ever before. And so pretty was she that it almost hurt one to look at her. Her mother begged her to go more slowly, but Massi laughed and called out that she wouldn't mind dancing now till she died! We heard it, all of us. She was perhaps not so happy as she let on. We understood her pretty well; it was not easy for her to choose between the two.

Karl Kvingstad had become dubious.

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"Do you think that Tarald will take the gaard?" he said to Anne in a corner. That she did not know. But she eyed him.

And the night went by; we hardly knew what became of it. There had gathered at Moholmen a great crowd of young people, and there was drinking all the way round, and loud revelling, and no sleep. It had all come about so strangely.

"This, boys, this is a wedding!" some one shouted.

But almost in the same moment another shouting something else.

"They're fighting outside!"

We rushed out, and there stood Tarald and Thor facing each other. It was a glittering moonlight night, crackling cold and clear, and there they were with knives drawn. We stood stock still and looked on. Our wits and our strength failed us. A weird light enveloped us as well as the fighters. Back and forth they moved, back and forth, without a sound; it meant life or death.

All at once Massi appeared among us, paused a moment, and called to them, her voice breaking with tears.

"Thor and Tarald! Tarald and Thor!"

She rushed forward and tried to get to them. They did not heed her. People seized her and held her back and forced her inside again, for

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here she merely made matters worse. All the menfolk closed in and separated the fighters and took from them their knives. Then we let them go to it and settle their differences as best they might. It was a bully fight. Blood flowed. Thor was as strong as an ox, and he had the upper hand, but Tarald was wild and rushed blindly in on him. And presently he whipped forth a new weapon, a large pistol, and aimed at Thor. There was a loud outcry all over the gaard, and then a deadly silence. And deadly still and pale the two rivals faced each other.

Tarald then threw his weapon aside; it struck the cowshed with a thud.

"Now!" he shouted, "Come on, if you dare!"

Thor came, and they closed anew; and none of the others wanted to interfere, for it was a serious business they had to settle between themselves. It was Gabriel who finally put a stop to the madness. He appeared at the door, completely beside himself, as a full grown man rarely is, so hoarse of speech we could not understand what he said. Within we heard womenfolk crying. Finally he recovered his speech.

"Come in!" he shouted, "Both of you,—right away. It's Massi!"

When they came in, it was all over with her. She breathed no longer. She had collapsed as they carried her in, had called the names of the

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two suitors, the last words she spoke, and had then become rigid almost at once. She lay a corpse on the bed.

There was no one then but was sober.

Thor and Tarald stood near each other, a short distance from the bed, the rest in a half circle about them. The mother bent down over her time and again, begged her to answer, for she could not yet believe that it was all over. None of us could believe it. Thor stalked across the floor and went out, Tarald after him, and finally the rest of us. We could not bear to stay within.

"Well, you didn't get her anyway." It was Tarald who spoke.

The other whirled about and stared at him. It seemed as if he woke up.

"That was an ugly thing to say," he answered, "but *I* say, would to God you had got her rather!"

Before the guests had all taken their departure, Tarald went up to Thor.

"I'm leaving the country again and this time for good. I don't suppose you can ever forgive me for coming here as I did?"

Thor turned white as he faced him. It was a hard struggle for him. Many of those who stood around urged that he ought to forgive

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Tarald, and talked seriously with him. And Thor offered him his hand.

"There's little now to quarrel about. And what has happened was perhaps for the best; we can't think otherwise. Nor shall you leave the country before we have followed Massi on her last journey."

Tarald was unable to say anything, but to judge from his silence, he agreed.

It turned out to be a large funeral,—larger than any the dale people could remember. All who had known her had thought a great deal of Massi. She had been of different stuff from most people, and now she loomed large in their thoughts, and they sorrowed greatly. Half the neighborhood turned out and accompanied her to the grave. It was a memorable funeral procession.

Thor had remained at Moholmen up to the time of the funeral. After the funeral he came forth and said he was not minded to leave Moholmen alone this time. He and Marja stood side by side, and they could see he held her hand. Marja was the youngest daughter in the family, a beautiful girl, and of marriageable age. She dared not look up, as she stood there, so young and modest, but they could see that she was supremely happy. The parents brightened up when they heard what Thor said, and the whole company wished both them and the children joy.

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Karl Kvingstad then wanted to be no less a man. He crossed the floor to Anne.

"You know what we have agreed on," he said. "Now we can make it public, we too."

"We have agreed on nothing," she answered.

"You surely don't mean to go back on me?" he asked.

But she looked him straight in the eyes.

"Remember what you asked when Tarald came. It was you then that went back on me."

"What's become of you, Tarald?" Thor then asked, looking about him.

Tarald went up to Anne, took her by the hand, and led her out on the floor.

"What do you say to that, Gabriel?" he asked.

Gabriel said "Amen!" and blessed them, and so did his wife. Thor then spoke up again,—he was so light of heart, and the words came easily to him.

"We're robbing your home," he said. "But we have talked the matter over, Tarald and I, and we couldn't do otherwise. It's pretty soon, to be sure, but better too early than too late," he added.

It came out later that both of them had wanted Marja, for she was the prettier of the two sisters, but when one of them heard of it he refused to get in the other's way,—they had had enough of that already. There was quite a

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struggle over it. But the upshot was, as we have seen, that Tarald was to have Anne and the gaard, and Thor to have Marja. That was what the girls wanted, too, it was said.

They lived happily each with his own. They were such good friends that they had to visit each other often.

——And that's the way it went. And the moral—I had it in mind all the time I was telling the story, but now it's clean gone. Well, it's all the same.

JOHAN FALKBERGET
OLD HEGGELI'S LAST POLKA

JOHAN FALKBERGET (1879-) has found a new background and a wealth of new material in the mining town Røros where he was born. His people were peasant miners. Nine years old, the boy was put to work in the mines and became initiated into the hard, rough life he describes. His formal education was of the scantiest, but he learned to know many varying types of people: peasants and vagrant laborers, Laps, Finns, Swedes, and Norwegians. When he began to study the history of the little mining town on the edge of the eternal snows, he found descendants of German skilled miners, Danish lords and ladies, Swedish generals, and even a king or two. All these he has woven into books that have more of the pure joy of story-telling than is common in Norwegian literature. Whatever of roughness or sordidness the material rendered inevitable is redeemed by the lusty vigor which runs through everything Falkberget has written, and by the feeling for nature which always adds an element of poetic beauty.

As the most important of Falkberget's older novels critics generally name *Lisbet from Jarnfjell* (1915) the story of a woman from the mountains who marries a man from the valley and never can reconcile herself to the alien conditions. *The Fourth Night Watch* (1923) is a novel of Røros about a hundred years ago. The hero is a clergyman whose moral nature succumbs to the numbing influence of his miserable surroundings, but who at last finds peace through faith and repentance.

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OLD HEGGELI'S LAST POLKA

IT WAS in the evening on the sixth day after Christmas. Day and night, ever since Christmas Eve, when the sound of bells in Aalen's old timber church set the air aquiver in the mountains up north and died away in the still of evening beyond Hessedale's dark birch leas, there had been one round of thundering revelry the whole length of the mountain dale. The feasting had begun at Aasbale,—where formerly in saga times the mighty men of the dale held their winter sacrifice,—and had continued southward from home to home, according to ancient custom, till on the sixth day after Christmas it wound up at Grön-aasen on the vast moors back in the mountains.

The tallow candles were burning low along the wall, and the pitch pine fire flickered, bloody red, on the open hearth.

Old Heggeli sat half dozing on the chopping block in the crimson glow from the ingle. His pointed cap hung askew over one ear, and his grey-speckled beard bristled about his strong-built jaws, as he quietly chewed his quid.

At his side stood a sturdy youth, his head bare,

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his hair in a sweat, his hands deep down in his trouser pockets. He looked down wearily. It was Bör Aasbale himself.

Old Heggeli straightened up a bit, and looked at him with bleary eyes.

“Aren’t you dancing, young fellow?” he asked raucously, half asleep. And from old habit he pulled at the belt that held his sheath knife.

Bör Aasbale did not answer.

Old Heggeli slumped down on his block again and dozed forward in the red glow.

The polka rang out wildly above the din of shouting and the clamping of frozen shoes on the icy floor. The cured meats dripped down the walls as they thawed, and under the rafters the dust lay thick. Through the black windows a few flickering beams from the light within raced in long strips over the snowdrifts in the moonlit night. It was biting cold; the timbers of the house creaked, and in the brushwood outside there were scurryings of wild things.

Henning Heggeli sat and dreamed himself back into the past. He had been along in the Christmas junketing here in the mountains since time out of mind almost. And jolly it had always been in the old days. Much jollier than now. Young folks now had become old and heavy footed. They just dragged their feet in the polka, by gosh, and as for kicking the rafters as

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they should in their handsprings, the less said about it the better. And no longer did they fight like men either.

Henning Heggeli worked himself up into a pothor. Many a dance he had attended these last two generations. But there was one especially that he remembered above all others. Old Heggeli slipped completely back into the memory of the past.

He was in his best years then. On the evening of the sixth day, the revellers had ended up here at Grönaasen, as the ancient custom was. It was already after midnight. Old Nefoss sat fiddling the Jotunpolka. Right in the middle of the dance young Heggeli bolted out through the door, in his shirt sleeves, with Ragnhild Borren by the hand. . . .

Out on the flagstone he threw his arms about her waist and drew her over towards the loft door. She resisted timidly.

"Are you crazy, man?" She tried to tear herself away.

"Of course I'm crazy!" he answered. "You're going back to the village with me, Ragnhild."

She hesitated a bit. "There'll be talk, Henning."

He drew her away. . . "That's what I want!" he answered vehemently.

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She leaned back against the wall in the dark; it all came so suddenly.

"You make light of everything." She could hardly keep from crying.

"Only not of you!" He drew her away again, and he was serious now when he spoke. "I'm fond of you, Ragnhild!"

"No—no!" she half whispered, and tore herself free from him. "No—no!"

She ran away from him, but stopped, shrinking, near a pile of logs. He stood in the cold winter night, every muscle in his body vibrating with the warmth and vigor of youth. He was the fiercest fighter in the valley, and now his blood was hot. He meant to have this girl, and ill would he fare who ever ventured to come between them. Yes, by Heaven,—he meant to have her! He ran over and threw his arms about her, and as they tumbled up against the log pile, the hoar frost from the brushwood above came drizzling down over them.

"Will you come with me, Ragnhild?"

Again she stood hesitant, wedged in between the log pile and his broad bosom, shy as a little bird, listening. She was mortally afraid people might come. Then suddenly she threw her arms round his neck, and her voice was warm as she breathed, "Yes, Henning, I will!"

Wild with joy, he seized her by the waist, held

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her aloft at arm's length, set her down, swung her round in the polka, and sent the snow whirling about them.

"You madcap!" she laughed softly, and drew her shawl down from one shoulder. Before she had time to tie it round her again, he had swung her once more in a mad dance. He tore off his cap, and leaping up on a ledge of ice, kicked it in the air.

"I believe you *are* crazy, Henning!" she laughed again, and reached for her shawl.

"Yes, crazy!"

He replaced his cap, and they talked more soberly. Then she stole in and put on her wraps, while he hitched the old horse to the sleigh.

A little later they were racing down the mountain side in the starlit night. The snow crunched beneath the runners, the icy steel rang out, the harness creaked and cracked, and the road echoed with the heavy tramp of the hoofs. Ragnhild nestled cozy and warm in Henning's lap, the sheepskin robe tucked snugly around them both. The frosty wind whistled over the barren hills.

Old Dobbin settled down to a slow, even gait, and thus they jogged across the broad moors down into the valley. There was no reason for haste that night. Far from it! For all they cared, the village could have been twice as far away, and the night both dark and endless. It

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was such a wonderful night! They belonged to each other now—now and forever.

She snuggled close to him beneath the sheep-skin robe, and let her eyes close. . . . If only the ride would last forever! She listened to the hoof beats, which sounded to her like the tramp, tramp, tramp of a nimbly footed polka. All the while, guide posts and thickets sped by like trolls stalking in the mountains. Such a strange night she had never known. This winter must never end. The stars blinked, and the icy wind sang out in the heather across the treeless hills.

As they approached the turn into Hessedale, where the valley is pitch dark, with walls of rock on either side, and the Hessafall roars beneath the ice, he reined in his horse. Surely he was speeding faster than need be.

Young Heggeli was beside himself with joy. Ah, what a comely girl he had! There was no one in the whole country had such another. . . . And he drew her to him in the sleigh. And there was laughter deep in his heart. He would be the valley's doughtiest man. So he told her. And she, a wife to be proud of. And many strange things they would. . . .

"Whoa, Dobbin, Whoa!"

He need not race so. There was no hurry. And old Dobbin came to a stop. He tossed his head first to one side and then to the other, and

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marvelled at the strange things happening in the sleigh behind him.

A fiddle string snapped. Old Heggeli came back to the present. Bör Aasbale still stood before him with his hands in his pockets.

"I must have dozed," said old Heggeli.

Aasbale looked at him.

"We want you to dance the Jotunpolka!" he said, as he ran his shirt sleeve over his wet hair.

Old Heggeli hemmed.

"I'm afraid I'm too old. You know when one has turned eighty—"

"Nonsense!" And Bör Aasbale called to the fiddler, as he turned away from the fire, "Let's have the Jotunpolka!—Now, girls, old Heggeli's going to dance!"

There was a friendly snicker among the women along the walls. They were ready enough to dance with him! A sprightlier dancer there had never been in the dale.

"I'm too old, I tell you, Bör!"

Old Heggeli looked up good-naturedly.

"Oh, you'll manage all right, old man!" Bör took him by the shoulder and tried to get him up.

"I'm too old, I say!"

He resisted. But Bör Aasbale would not give in, and when the fiddler struck up the familiar polka, Old Heggeli pulled down over his head

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his cap, and removed his quid of tobacco and stuck it in his waistcoat. He paused a bit—then ambled stiff-jointed over to Valborg Borren. She was his niece on his wife's side.

"Well, Valborg, we'll have to try it, I guess," he said. "You're of the kind I'm most used to."

Valborg laughed as she took his hand, looked modestly down at the floor, and tripped lightly away with him, as he swung into the dance. He whirled her round, and shouted till the walls rang, threw his arms about her and swung her round again. His sheathed knife dangled up and down the seat of his trousers.

"Not so bad, old man!" called Aasbale.

Henning hemmed loudly. "Faderullen. . . . Oh—ho!" He turned a handspring and tried to reach the cross beams. But he could not quite make it. He tried a second time and struck with the soles of his shoes. . . "Ho-ho . . . !" He tramped wildly and heavily. The floor sagged beneath him. The dance was like a storm that swept by, like the roar of a torrent, like the swishing of birches. God forgive him all he had sinned and danced in his day! And it seemed to him that the drift snow crushed the mountain brushwood in the dark autumn night.

"Oh-ho! Dirrl-amti doodlee-doo! Dirrl-amti doodlee-doo. . ."

And he was again a wild youngster on foot in

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the rugged hills with the bloody steel in his hand. "Ho-ho . . !" God forgive him all he had danced and sinned in his day! Soon Old Heggeli would dance no more . . . and a sadness came upon him.

The dance ended in a quivering note on the E-string, and Old Heggeli shambled giddily over to his seat. Bör Aasbale stood there with a bottle of something.

"Now, old man, you have a right to an honest drink!" he said.

Old Heggeli reached for the two-pint bottle.

"I'm no good any more, I tell you!" he muttered, as he brushed the beard away from his mouth.

"Come, drink now, old man!" urged Bör Aasbale. "You're still a spry youngster!"

"Oh, I'm a worn-out youngster, I guess—now."

Old Heggeli drank, and there was a touch of softness in his strong face.

That same night Old Heggeli rode down the ravine towards Hessedale. In the narrow lane he reined in his horse.

"Whoa, Dobbin, Whoa!"

He crawled stiffly out of the sleigh, and stood musing, his knees bent under his Lap coat.

Yes,—here it was. Here, right under the wall of rock, they loitered that night well over fifty

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years ago. Now she had slept many a long year beneath the sod, and he lingered on alone. It had been a dull life for him since Ragnhild went. But the time would soon come when he would follow her. He was strangely moved to-night.

He shuffled over to the horse, the skirt of his fur coat flopping in the icy wind, and stroked the animal's mane.

Here it was,—yes. . . And that night was like this one. Starlit and cold. Everything then was as now. Except that Ragnhild was gone. And he had become a doddering old man.

A long time he stood thus, with a hand on the harness, while the black night rushed on. Both horse and man loomed in the darkness as if hewn in stone.

MIKKJEL FÖNHUS

THE MOOSE-HUNTER

MIKKJEL FÖNHUS (1894-) has won great popularity by his animal stories. His background is the wild upland of Valders and Hallingdal on the edge of the Jotunheimen glaciers. He describes nature on the windswept heights, and writes of animals and of men almost as primitive. Several of his books are in fact biographies of a single animal as *The Trail of the Elk* (Norwegian title, *Troll-Elgen*) and *The Reindeer Buck of Jotunfjell*. Fönhus is a keen observer and knows well the law of the wilderness that life goes on only by feeding on other life. Therefore he writes without sentimentality, but with a breeziness and freshness that are very attractive. His style is manly and vigorous. In *The Raudal Dance* Fönhus has essayed a broader picture of folk life.

Mikkjel Fönhus

THE MOOSE-HUNTER

IN the wilds of Norway, where the wolf howls hungrily in the winter nights, lies Bjödal, an uninhabited valley about twenty miles in length. It is rarely that any one enters it, only now and again a solitary hunter. At long intervals distant rifle-shots disturb the peace, and then even the silence seems to start and lie listening.

In the northernmost part of Bjödal stands a little hut with a turf roof. Summer and winter goes, and there is no sign of a fire being lighted in it. One autumn morning, however—the twenty-eighth of September—smoke begins to rise from the rusty stove-pipe on the roof. The smoke is thick and black, as when resinous wood is burning. It sends out a strong scent, which penetrates far into the forest; and a fox which has been spending the night in revelry turns quickly aside. It is not quite light yet. The darkness hangs in the air and in the trees, but the daylight has begun to drift in across the eastern heights, and the morning mist lies over marsh-land and lake.

A man emerges, stooping, from the door of

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the hut, with a coffee-kettle in his right hand: he goes down the south side of the hut, where he bends down and fills the kettle from a pool of water.

The man's name is Peter Varpet. He is a small, but sturdily built man, limps a little with his right foot, but is quick and active. He is bare-headed, and his hair is thin and a little gray. Beneath his brows are a pair of small eyes, which nothing escapes. For Peter is the best moose-hunter to be found in the Bjödal district; and in spite of his being a little lame and having left the first forty years of his life behind him, no one can keep up with him in a long run.

As he opens the door of the hut to go in again, a large, gray moose-dog slips out. It takes a stand at the corner of the hut, looks thoughtfully towards the forest, and shakes itself. It is Storm, Peter's dog, and the two resemble each other. If they put up a moose together, they follow it until they see the blood streaming from the animal's throat.

This autumn, however, moose-hunting in Bjödal has been poor. Peter cannot understand what has become of the moose; they seem to have vanished from the face of the earth as if they had taken wings and flown away. He has tramped about now for three weeks, and the heels of his

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shoes are worn down and the soles thin; but never a moose has he skinned.

It was here, the evening before, up under the mountain, that a moose came running close past him, quite unexpectedly. He had not even time to get his gun off his shoulder before it was gone; but he had noticed one thing and that was that the animal had very large and quite extraordinary antlers. There were a great many branches upon one of them, and fewer on the other; and he had never seen that on a moose before.

But he knew what sort of an animal this was. It was a magic moose which had frequented this desolate mountain valley for countless years, a moose which no hunter and no dog had succeeded in bringing down. Long tales were told about this wonderful animal, and it was the firm belief of hunters over the mountain plateau that it was unlucky to follow the magic moose. They could tell how one man had broken an arm while chasing it, how another was all but drowned in a river he had to cross after this moose.

Peter has also hunted this mysterious animal with which the dog never manages to keep up. The moose outdistances the dog, swims across one lake after another, climbs up and down mountain after mountain; indeed the magic moose clambers about mountains like a fox. But now Peter means to follow the tracks of yesterday evening, and

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he will not give up as long as he has a bite of food left, or as long as the dog is able to crawl; for it is Peter's way to grow more eager the longer he hunts without result. His energy has gathered strength during his fruitless hunting this autumn. He means to follow the moose with the curious horns—if need be, into the infernal regions. He takes his oath on this, and when the coffee is made, he has breakfast, locks the door, and sets off up the wooded slope to the mountain with its naked sides, on which here and there a glacier lies shining like silver in the light of the rising sun.

* * *

It is now evening. Peter Varpet has hunted the magic moose from sunrise to sunset. Storm has followed the animal from sky-line to sky-line, but it has never stood still so long that Peter could come up to it. Now he is sitting upon a mountain-top, so drenched with perspiration that he has not a dry thread upon his body; and far away to the north, where the sky still glows after the setting of the sun, he can hear the last short barks of his dog. He raises his gun and fires straight up into the air; and half an hour later Storm joins him, and together they make their way to a deserted sæter and creep in.

There are two skin rugs here, but even be-

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neath them Peter shivers with cold; he builds a big fire, but he still shivers with cold. It seems as if his very body had ceased to develop heat; the cold comes from within. During the night a head-ache comes on, and he begins to cough. There is a pain, too, in his left side that will not go, however much he rubs and rubs. When he draws a breath it is as if something were lying at the back of the left lung and preventing it from taking in the air.

This was exactly how it began two years ago when he had inflammation of the lungs and was in bed for a month. That time, too, he had been in just such a perspiration and had shivered with cold afterwards. Since then he had sometimes noticed, when he had been running really hard, a little sharp pain in his left side when he breathed; but he had never troubled about it, and it had always gone again, and so it would be sure to do now.

At about one he had to get up again and tend to the fire. It was a beautiful moonlight night; the grass was white with frost, and the river on the marshland below shone like silver. As he stood at the window, he could see through the little square panes the huge shoulder of Kuvfjeld standing up above the belt of forest. He had once shot a bear in its winter lair up there.

But he must try to get some sleep. He has

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to be up and off to the forest again by six. But while he dozed for two or three hours, he kept on dreaming, and Storm raised his head again and again because his master talked in his sleep. Peter dreamed that he was running after the moose with the curious horns, and was so breathless that he thought he was going to die. At last the moose stood still; but when he fired, he could see the bullet emerging in a leisurely way from the barrel. He saw it all through the air, and when it fell on the moose, it bounded off like a pea.

He awoke in a perspiration, and then began shivering with cold.

He did not sleep much that night, but when day broke he nevertheless prepared to set off for the forest, made coffee, and tied up his bag, though the pain in his side was still there, and his head throbbed violently. But as he staggered across the grass, and felt how sore and feeble his whole body seemed to be, he began to have misgivings.

It would take four or five hours to get down to human habitations, and to be left lying ill up in the forest could only end in one way. It would not be much better to be here in the sæter-hut, although at least one had a roof over one's head. Perhaps it would be better to stay in the hut for the present, and see how things turned

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out. He could wait at any rate until later in the day, and perhaps he would be better then.

He did not get better, however; he grew worse. The pain in his left side spread to the right, too, and his breath was short and insufficient. When he became aware of this, he was at once the prudent forester. He collected all the wood he could find about the hut, and brought in a supply of water. Out in the dairy-hut he found a couple of ragged blankets, which he also brought in; but when all this was done he was perspiring at every pore. He built a fire and wrapped himself up well. The beams of the morning sun filtered in over the floor and down the wall; and as the hours passed, the patches of sunlight moved on, and the fire on the hearth died down, but still went on smoking for a long time after the flame was extinguished.

Peter had now become feverish. His brown, tanned face was flushed and red, and his cold, clear eyes were languid and moist. He was not afraid, but he did think it was a little uncomfortable to be lying here miles away from any human being. No one knew where he was. He had told them at home that he was going to Bjödal, but the valley was so long and devious that any indications of locality were of necessity vague. There was as little chance of finding him as of finding a needle in a haystack. For that

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matter it would be a long time before any one thought of looking for him; for when Peter went to the forest, they did not expect him back until they saw him at the door.

No, it must be confessed that the situation was a little unpleasant.

The hours passed with astonishing rapidity, and as they passed, the fire in Peter's tough, hardy body grew hotter. He fought with all his will against the illness, but the illness was stronger than his will, and his will was forced to give way. By the end of the afternoon the inflammation had taken a firm hold.

Away on the field-fence a little bird sat singing its song while the rays of the evening sun played upon its soft plumage.

The change from day to night is rapid, indefinite, and noiseless. The shadows on the floor become indistinct, while they still remain for a little time longer on the window-sill; but at last they are lost there too. It is darkest in the corner where Peter is lying, and the gloom grows deeper and deeper, and spreads to the other corners. A tin pan on the wall holds the light for a time, and the new shingle roof of the cow-shed in the field shines white in the evening light.

All day Storm has been restless, for he cannot comprehend why Peter has gone to bed and makes no attempt to go out. Again and again he goes

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up to the bed, and pushes his cold nose into Peter's face; and then Peter puts out a hand and pats the dog's head. "Poor old fellow!" he says. "Poor old fellow!"

For a time it is quite dark, and the stillness of night rests upon the hut. The only sound within is the unnaturally rapid breathing of the man in the bed—a heavy, gasping breath, as after long running. The sick man seldom turns in his bed.

Outside, the moonlight is again flooding the river and the frosty meadow. What o'clock it is Peter does not know, when Storm suddenly rises and begins to snuff at the door. He puts his nose close to the narrow crack between the door and the frame, where a cold draught from without enters, and keeps on snuffing and snuffing. He then begins to growl and his back bristles, and at this Peter's attention is aroused. The dog has evidently noticed something unusual. Peter listens for foot-steps. Oh, if only it were people! Never before had he so longed to see a human being.

But he can hear no footsteps. Suddenly Storm turns, and going to the window stands on his hind legs with forepaws on the sill still growling and bristling.

Then the hunter comes to life again in Peter. He throws off his coverings, slips over the edge of the bed, and rises to his feet. His body seems

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to have lost the power of keeping its balance, and reels now to one side, now to another. He staggers to the window, and then catches his breath; for there, at the edge of the wood, not a hundred yards off, stands a moose, perfectly still, with its side towards him. It has enormous antlers, with ever so many branches on one of them, and few on the other. It is the moose he was hunting the day before—the magic moose.

Trembling with excitement and fever, Peter creeps to his gun hanging on the wall. It is loaded. He tells the dog to keep quiet. The moose is still standing there motionless, long-legged and heavily built, with its gaze fixed upon the forest, seemingly deep in thought. The silver lamp in the sky shines full upon it.

Peter has forgotten the fever boiling in his veins; for a moment the mist in his brain seems to drift away, and he is once more in possession of the hunter's clear judgment and power of quick determination. If he shoots through the window, the bullet is very likely to be turned aside and take the wrong direction. He raises the gun to his shoulder, drives the muzzle through the window-pane, and as a shower of splinters falls upon the floor there is a loud report, and the dog with a yelp runs to the door.

The moose at the border of the forest turns

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completely round, then takes a few faltering steps, stops, hesitates a little, and drops to the ground.

The door of the sæter-hut opens; a dog dashes out, and after him totters a man. But Peter is obliged to turn and go in again without reaching the moose. It is all he can do to crawl to the bed and wrap himself up. Now that the excitement is over he collapses, and at midnight only his labored breathing disturbs the silence in the black darkness of the sæter-hut.

Out in the September night lies the moose with the curious antlers, its body still warm.

* * *

A new day dawns in Bjödal. There is no smoke rising from the sæter where Peter Varpet is lying, but now and again a dog slips out and in at the door which is standing ajar. The moose lying at the border of the wood is now plainly visible, its legs extended and its head stretched out. The sky has clouded over, and the air is heavy and thick.

Away on the western slopes two hunters are following the day-old track of a moose. They break up a pine-stump to make a fire, and sit down beside it. While sitting thus they hear the howling of a dog on the other side of the valley, repeated again and again, then ceasing, and then beginning once more.

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"What's that?" says one.

"I wonder," says the other.

The dog goes on howling.

The hunters go to a knoll from which they can see a sæter and a dog sitting on the grass outside; but they can see no people about.

"I wonder if there's anything wrong over there," says the taller of the two, a muscular young fellow with well-marked features. Moving on, they enter the sæter-field from the south, but here their dog grows curiously eager. They follow him and come upon the dead moose. The animal has been shot in the right place, low down behind the shoulder.

At that moment the howling ceases, and Storm comes towards them with bristling back, but runs in again in front of them. A man is lying on the bed, and a gun is leaning against the wall. The man talks incessantly.

"That got him!" he says. "Just look at him falling!" And then he murmurs something they do not understand. One of the men goes up to him, and sees that he is damp with perspiration and in a fever heat.

"Are you sick?" he asks.

Peter opens his eyes wonderingly. "Yes," I must ha' been sick," he says.

Storm springs up on the bed and lies down close to his master's head, whence he growls at

Mikkjel Fönhus

the strange dog down on the floor. One of the men has already begun to make a fire on the hearth. An hour later he is on his way down to the valley, while the other remains at the sæter. All night the fire burns, and Peter Varpet talks more wildly than ever.

* * *

Three weeks later Peter is at home in his cottage, pale and thin. The yellow leaves of October are dropping one by one on the fields, as the trees throw off their raiment, to stand at last bare and naked; but the fir-clad slopes to the west are as green as ever, creeping higher and higher until they change into bare mountain. Far off in these mountains Peter can see a little cleft. It is Bjödal.

On the wall of his stabur are two great moose-horns, with thirteen tines on the one, and eight on the other—the horns of the magic moose.

Peter lights his pipe, and the smoke drifts away, blue and strong on the clear air.

“It was a long moose-hunt this time!” he thinks. “But it was good fun all the same!”

SIGRID UNDSET

SIMONSEN

SIGRID UNSET (1882-) represents in Norwegian literature a new idealism which is in certain ways a return to old standards. After an age that had vindicated the rights of the individual, she lent the glamor of her genius to a life-theory that had more to say about duties than about rights. She has upheld the sacredness of the family and has asserted an ideal of marriage calling for sacrifice and devotion. Her early works nearly all had an Oslo background; they pictured the life of the impecunious middle class with sympathetic knowledge and with surprising artistic finish. The book which won her recognition was *Jenny* (1911) in which she treated with daring frankness the problem of a young girl who compromised with her ideals of love. The scene is partly laid in Italy, but the heroine is of the familiar Oslo milieu.

From her father, a noted archeologist, the late Ingvald Martin Undset, Sigrid Undset inherited an interest in Norway's history. Her knowledge of medieval conditions and ways of thought was used as the basis for her novel trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter*, a work which for epic strength and breadth stands unequalled in Norwegian literature. Its three parts have been translated as *The Bridal Wreath*, *The Mistress of Husaby*, and *The Cross*. Against a colorful thirteenth century background, it shows the life of a woman as daughter, mistress, wife, and mother and at last in the loneliness of death. Sigrid Undset's last work is another large biographical novel from a period not far removed from that of *Kristin Lavransdatter*. *Olav Audunssøn* has less of color and action but is if anything more profound in its soul-searching. In both these medieval novels the Church plays an important part in its influence on individual lives.

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SIMONSEN

SIMONSEN paused a moment at the gate entrance, and dug out his old grease-worn wallet, in order to put away a testimonial he held in his hand. But before he did so, he smoothed the soiled paper out and read it through, although he knew it by heart already.

“Anton Simonsen has been a warehouse clerk in our employ for three years. During that time he has proved himself a willing, sober, and industrious worker.

“The Hercules Machine Shops,
By N. NIELSEN.”

That testimonial—bah!—wouldn't help him very far. It was pretty damn cheap of the manager—confound him! He was surely not so averse ordinarily to cramming his customers full of lies about one thing and another—shipping dates and the like, but when it came to giving a poor fellow a testimonial which might help smooth the way for him and get him something to do,—ah, that was another matter. “Yes, but I can't very well write that your work has been entirely satisfactory,” the old sniffer had said.

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But the word "sober," at any rate, he had forced him to put in. That wasn't in the first draft. He—Simonsen—had insisted that he put it in. "It seems to me, Simonsen," the manager had said, "that you've smelled of liquor at all hours of the day almost." But at that he had opened up on him. "I've taken a drink now and again, it is true, Mr. Manager," he had said, "but that I venture you'd have done too if you had to dig around all day in that clammy warehouse. But there's no one can say that Anton Simonsen has ever been drunk on the job. Not even a bit on edge once." Well, at that the old wind-bag had had to give in, and the girl copyist had had to re-write the testimonial with the word "sober" in it. So there it was—such as it was! It didn't amount to very much, it is true, and, what was worse, he had none better to show.

"Look out there, you damn fool!"

Simonsen jumped to one side, in towards the wall. A wagon loaded with iron beams swung rattling through the gate. The big horses steamed and sweat as they dug in with all their might to get the load over the stone bridge at the gateway entrance. The driver yelled something after him, but Simonsen could not hear what it was he said, for it was drowned in the rattle and rumble of the iron beams.

He put the testimonial away and stuck the

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wallet in his breast pocket. He glowered with hostile eyes after the wagon. It had come to a stop up against the warehouse, just opposite a huge crane, which with its pulleys and chains projected out from a dark hole, between barred windows, in the smoky red-brick wall. The flanks of the horses were steaming white, and the hairs on their sides were plastered together in little wet tufts. The driver had not blanketed them; he stood talking with another fellow.

Simonsen buttoned his winter coat, comparatively new and in fair condition, straightened up, and thrust his abdomen out. There rose within him a feeling of bourgeois dignity; he still considered himself a better member of society than this ruffian driver, even though the fellow did berate him. And with this self-consciousness there was vaguely merged another feeling, which had stirred within him at the sight of the two work-horses, as they tugged away and flexed the muscles of their perspiring flanks. He stepped in through the gate.

"It seems to me you ought to blanket your horses. There's certainly no sense in letting the poor creatures stand unprotected this way in the cold—sweaty as they are."

The driver—a tall, lanky brute—faced about and looked down at him.

"Any of your business, fatty?"

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"What do you suppose would happen to you if I were to go up to the office and report how you're treating their horses?"

"Pick up your legs and beat it, and be quick about it. What's it to you any way? There's no need of your butting in." And the driver moved threateningly towards him.

Simonsen drew back a bit, but, he reflected, the fellow would hardly dare touch him here, and he thrust his paunch out still more.

"Well, I merely wanted to call to your attention that they can see you from the office window—how you are treating the company's horses."

With that he faced about. The self-assured bourgeois feeling left him almost immediately. For just as he passed through the gate a man rushed down the stairs and swept by him—red-faced and blond and light-haired—dressed in fur cap and coat and swinging a silver headed cane—the same man he had interviewed at the time he had applied for the position.

It was beginning to grow dark outside. It was going towards four o'clock already. Olga, no doubt, would scold a bit when he came home so late for dinner. Oh well, he'd simply have to tell her he'd had to stay the extra hour at the warehouse.

Simonsen trudged rapidly down Torvgaten. He seemed to mince and drag his steps at the

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same time, and what with his large round paunch and his bowed arms he suggested a rubber ball rolling and bouncing along. Slight of build he was, and short-necked, and his face was fat and flabby, with bleary eyes that lay deeply hid beneath his eyebrows, bloodshot cheeks, and a blueish something of a nose above a drooping grayish-yellow mustache.

It was a wretched Saturday afternoon in the forepart of December, and the air was thick with a cold, gray fog, which both smelled and tasted of gas and soot. Out in the street the sleighs skidded over the hard-frozen, rut-worn snow, and on the walks the stream of humanity swept, dark and heavy, past the lighted, frosty shop windows. Every moment, as he trudged along, immersed in his own thoughts, there was some one who ran into him and glowered angrily back at him.

Not that there was much in the way of thoughts stirring in his mind. For he kept pushing them aside. Surely he would find something by that time. So that he'd not have to let Olga know that he had been laid off finally, beginning with the first of the year. Ugh, life certainly was a struggle!

There was no hurry; he still had the better part of a month left before the beginning of the year. But if worse came to worse, he would have

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to write to Sigurd. Sigurd could easily get him another job. That wasn't too much to ask of a son who was as well established as Sigurd was. It would not be any fun, to be sure; this would be the fourth time. But then it was only four times in eight years. It was eight years ago exactly this coming New Year that Sigurd had got him that place in the office—all because that elegant daughter-in-law—the vixen—had felt he was not swell enough to have around her home in Fredrikstad. It was unfortunate, to be sure, that he had messed up things in all three places, but that wasn't his fault. In the office it had been the women—the jealous hens—who had got it in for him, as though it was any of their business what sort of man he was as long as he minded his work—and that he had done. And he had never tried to become too familiar with any of them. On that score he was clear. They needn't worry—upstart, angular, washed-out hussies they were. Yes, and then there was the lumber warehouse. There certainly he had been proper and orderly in every way, for it was just at the time that he had taken up with Olga. True, he had not been accustomed to work of that kind, but if it had not been for malice on the part of the foreman he would never have lost that job. And after that he had got into the machine shop. Ah, it was no easy matter for a man already well up towards

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sixty to learn to master all the mysterious intricacies—all new to him—in connection with the selling and the shipping and the storing and what not. The warehouse foreman was a lazy scamp, and always he—Simonsen—had to shoulder the blame. And right from the start they had been disagreeable to him—from the manager and the chief clerk, who were forever reminding him that he was there only temporarily, and kept asking him whether he didn't have something else in view, down to the warehouse foreman and the other foremen and the teamsters—and the lady cashier, always so crabby and sour and cross and irritable every time he came up and asked for part of his pay in advance.

A gray feeling of restlessness and despondency settled over him like a clammy fog. He shuddered when he thought how Olga would fret and stew when he came home, and how extremely disagreeable Sigurd and his wife would be when they learned that he had been laid off, and how he would be starting in again at some new place, where, dazed and fearful and at his wits' end, he would be rushing around at new tasks, which he did not understand and probably never would come to know—in another warehouse or perhaps another office, full of strangers, unfamiliar and hostile—always cowering beneath constant reprimands and complaints, passively awaiting, half ex-

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pecting another dismissal, just as he had rushed about and humbled himself, sluggish and old and stupid, through all his other jobs.

Simonsen was, in spite of all, however, somewhat adept at keeping unpleasant thoughts at arm's length. In reality he had gone through life that way, had humbled himself, and had come to look upon dismissals and reprimands and cross words and unpleasantnesses as inevitable. So it had been at sea, and so it had been at the docks when he was with Isachsen, and so it had been at home with his wife, as long as she lived. Cross and dour and severe and disagreeable—his daughter-in-law was not altogether unlike her for that matter. Well, Sigurd had been only too well repaid for aspiring to marry Captain Myhre's climbing daughter. Ah, how cozy their home had been those years immediately after Laura died! The boy had got a good start, and kind he had always been to his old father, had paid royally for his keep and everything. Not that he had been altogether unhappy here either at first, as a bachelor again and a man about town—he had been into things, had had a good time and lots of fun and all that—and later when he took up with Olga he had in reality—he couldn't deny it—been very comfortable—most of the time, at any rate. A little disagreeable, to be sure, it had been at the time Olga became with child, but Olga

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was not altogether to blame for that, and she had reconciled herself to it immediately when he had promised her marriage. Even yet, of course, she raised a fuss about it at times and insisted he go through with it and marry her. Not that he didn't some time intend to do it—he'd have done it long ago, had it not been for the disagreeable complications he foresaw with Sigurd and his wife. But some day surely an easy, respectable job must fall to his lot, which would be his permanently—and when Olga was able to enlarge her dressmaking establishment, and Henry, her boy, got into the office, where he was now running errands—for that he had been promised; the fellow was rounding out quite satisfactorily—well, they might then at last get a cozy little place and be happy together. He could sit in the sofa with his glass of toddy and his pipe, while Olga went about her work in a leisurely way, and Svanhild sat near him and studied her lessons. For Olga was a real genuine soul, and no one should have occasion to say about Svanhild that she was an illegitimate child—when the time came for her to start school.

Simonsen had by now reached Ruselökveien. The fog lay thick and clammy in the narrow street, streaked here and there by yellow-green light from frozen shop windows, and in all of them, wherever the heat from the gas light or

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the lamp had cleared a space on the frosted windows, could be seen displays of Christmas tree baskets, whether it was a general merchandise shop or a delicatessen or a tobacco shop. The reddish glare from the huge exhibition windows of the two-story bazaar on the other side of the street oozed unctuously out into the fog. The gas lamps up on the Terrace were just barely discernible. But the private dwellings beyond were entirely lost. Not a single ray of light penetrated to the street from them, although they could be sensed vaguely as towering walls in the fog—which, as it were, dwarfed the street below into a mere gutter.

Simonsen trudged along mincingly. The walks in many places, where the ice had not been cut away, were slippery. Children swarmed about on all sides. Out in the street, between vans and sleighs, they attempted to slide, if it were only along an icy rut in the rough, irregular, brown layer of hard frozen snow.

“Svanhild!”

Simonsen called sharply to a little girl in a dirty white cap. She had crawled up on the bank of snow, piled high along the walk, and let herself slide down into the street on her wee tiny skis, which were quite black from the soot and the dirty snow, and had almost no bend left in them.

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The child stood stock still in the middle of the street and looked up at Simonsen as he straddled the snow bank and went out to her. Her heaven-blue eyes testified to a guilty conscience, as she brushed her light hair up under her cap, and wiped her little nose with her red-mittened hand.

"And how many times have you been told, Svanhild, that you are not to run out into the street! Why can't you be a good girl and play in the court?"

Svanhild glanced up timidly.

"But I can't very well ski in the court—for there's no hill there, and—"

"Suppose a wagon came along and ran over you, or a drunken man came up and ran away with you—what do you think pappa and mamma would say then?"

Svanhild was ashamed and said nothing. Simonsen helped her onto the walk again, and they tripped away hand in hand, her tiny, strip-like skis clattering down the bare walk.

"Do you think pappa will take you out walking to-night, if you're a bad girl, and won't do as you're told to?—I suppose they've already had dinner?"

"Oh, yes, mamma and Henry and I have eaten long ago——"

Hm! Simonsen trudged in through the gate. A white metal sign read: "Mrs. Olga Martinsen,

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Dressmaking Establishment. Children's and Boys' Clothes. Third Floor Rear." Simonsen crossed the court diagonally, and glanced up towards a lighted window, against which some fashion journals leaned. Then he picked up Svanhild's skis under his arm and led the child up the narrow back stairway.

Outside Olga's hall door a couple of youngsters stood reading a paper-bound book in the glare of a kitchen lamp which had been hung out. Simonsen grumbled something and let himself in.

The hall was dark. At the farther end a streak of light issued through the door from the living room. Simonsen went into his own room. It was dark there too—and cold. Ugh, she had let the fire go out. He lit the lamp.

"Run in, Svanhild, and tell mamma I am here."

He opened the door to the room adjoining. At the table, overflowing with cut and half-sewed garments and scraps of lining, sat Miss Abrahamson bent over her sewing. She had fastened a newspaper to one side of the lamp, and all the light fell on her little yellow spinster face and diminutive brown hands. There was a little reflection of light from the two steel sewing machines, and in towards the wall could be seen the white beds of Olga and Svanhild.

"And you're at it harder than ever, Miss Abrahamson."

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"Ah yes—one has to, you know."

"Yes, isn't this Christmas business the funniest thing—it's almost as if the world was coming to an end."

Svanhild slipped in from the living room.

"Mamma says to say your dinner is in the warming oven."

"Well, I guess I'll stay right here and make myself comfortable, Miss Abrahamsen; it's so cold in my room—and then, too, I'll have pleasant company."

Miss Abrahamsen had quietly cleared a corner of the table, while Simonsen brought out the dinner—cabbage soup and sausages.

Hm! Not so bad. Now if one only had—," Simonsen got up and tapped on the door to the living room.

"Oh, Olga—"

"Why good evening, Simonsen! And how are you?"

He opened the door and peered in.

"Well, if it isn't Miss Hellum! And you're having another new dress again?"

Olga, her mouth full of pins, was busy fitting Miss Hellum, arranging the folds over her bust before the console mirror.

"About so, I guess."

Olga removed the lamp from the nickel holder on the wall and held it up.

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"It seems all right. You're sure it's not crooked in the back, Mrs. Martinsen?"

The two girls who sat waiting over on the plush sofa in the twilight laid aside their fashion journal, looked at each other and smiled, looked at Miss Hellum and smiled again to each other. "Heavens!" one of them whispered audibly. They were almost duplicates, in dress and everything, with rather short jackets, little neck pieces of fur, and nice-looking felt hats with feathers on. Simonsen was still at the door—they embarrassed him a bit.

"Well, what do you think, Simonsen? Is it going to be pretty?"

"Ah, it is remarkable how that color suits you, Miss Hellum—but then anything looks well on the beautiful, as the saying goes."

"Oh, you—!" Miss Hellum exclaimed and chuckled.

Lovely girl—this Miss Hellum! Olga cut around the neck, and Miss Hellum bent her head and shuddered a little as the cold scissors touched her skin. A lovely full neck, with yellow curly hair all the way down, and arms that were soft and round.

"Costly stuff too, I imagine," Simonsen remarked, as he touched the silk—and her arm—while Olga worked on the sleeve.

"For shame, Simonsen," Miss Hellum laughed.

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Olga looked daggers. She pushed him aside, as she tugged at the sleeve.

"Oh yes, that reminds me—Olga, couldn't Henry run down and get a bottle or two of beer?"

"Henry's had to go down to the office again, poor fellow—some estimate or other that had to be copied, he said."

"Poor fellow—he had to go down again, did he?—It seems to me it's getting to be almost every Saturday afternoon. Ah yes, life is a struggle! It was almost four o'clock before I got away from the warehouse. Oh, if one were only young and beautiful, Miss Hellum!"

Svanhild peeped in.

"Come in here, Svanhild! Do you remember my name to-day?"

"Miss Hellum," Svanhild smiled modestly.

"I suppose you'd like some candy to-day too, wouldn't you?" Miss Hellum opened her purse and brought out a little bag.

"Oh ho, and what do you say now, Svanhild? And your hand, Svanhild! And you can curtsy, can't you?"

Svanhild whispered her thanks, offered her hand, and curtsied. And she took to breaking apart the pieces of camphorated candy which had stuck together.

Miss Hellum talked and laughed while she put on her wraps.

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"Well, I'll expect it ready for a final fitting Tuesday next then, about this time. And you won't disappoint me, Mrs. Martinsen, will you? Well, good-bye! Good-bye, Simonsen! And good-bye, Svanhild!"

Simonsen gallantly opened the door, and Miss Hellum swept out, the feathers on her hat swaying as she went, her muskrat neck piece flung loosely down over her shoulders.

"Whew!" one of the girls on the sofa giggled. "Not so bad, eh—!"

"Say, she was a regular —."

Simonsen withdrew again to Miss Abrahamson and his dinner, which had got cold. Olga came in after a while with the coffee and poured it.

"Really, it's beyond me, Anton—it's perfectly ridiculous the way you carry on! What can you be thinking of—when there are others around, too, listening!"

"Who were those silly gigglers anyway?"

"The minister's hired girl on the Terrace and a friend of hers. It seems to me you have made it difficult enough as it is for me—without carrying on in this way with that Hellum woman. Well, they'll have something to talk about now—as if they didn't have enough already."

"Shucks! I don't imagine it was as bad as all that."

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The door bell rang. Miss Abrahamsen went out to answer it.

"It is Miss Larsen."

Olga set aside her cup and picked up a basted dress and threw it over her arm.

"Never a moment's peace!"

Miss Abrahamsen bent forward over her sewing again.

Mrs. Martinsen and Miss Abrahamsen sat and sewed all day Sunday. They put off their dinner till it was too dark to work, and when it was over, Olga lit the lamp, and they took up their sewing again.

"That vestee of Miss Olsen's, weren't you working on it, Miss Abrahamsen, a while ago?"

Miss Abrahamsen set her machine whirring.

"I laid it on the table."

Olga searched the table—and then the floor—for it.

"Svanhild, you haven't seen a little white bib, have you—of lace?"

"No, mamma, I haven't," Svanhild answered from the corner by the window. And she jumped up and began hunting too, but first she settled her doll in the up-turned footstool, which served as a cradle, and covered it carefully.

"Astri is sleeping. She has diphtheria and scarlet fever," she protested, as her mother rum-

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maged around among the doll clothes. But Olga took the patient ruthlessly out of her cradle. The doll was wrapped in a white pleated bit of lace, carefully fastened about with safety pins.

"Really, are you crazy, child! And if she hasn't torn a hole in it with the pins! You naughty girl!" and she cuffed Svanhild on the ear. "Oh, what shall I do now—this costly lace of Miss Olsen's too!"

Svanhild howled.

"But I thought it was only a rag, mamma!"

"Haven't I told you you're not to touch anything, not even what's on the floor? Ugh, what a naughty girl you are!"

Miss Abrahamsen inspected the vestee.

"I think I can take up the pleats, and then press it and repleat it, so as to bring the tear inside one of the folds—I don't think it will show any—."

Svanhild kept right on howling.

"Well, what's the matter now, Svanhild—crying like this when you know pappa is taking a nap?"

Olga was furious as she explained the trouble.

"What a naughty little girl you are, Svanhild—to play such tricks on mamma! For shame,—this isn't my little Svanhild!"

"It seems to me you might take her out, Anton.

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It's not particularly good for you either to be lying around and sleeping all day."

Simonsen scolded the child industriously as he went off with her. But he comforted her when they had reached the hall and he put on her wraps.

"Come, don't cry any more now! Shame on you for crying so! We'll go over in the park and slide. You know it wasn't nice of you. So wipe your nose now. Pappa'll take you sliding—come along, sweetheart—pappa'll take you sliding—."

Olga was perhaps a bit too severe at times with Svanhild. Not, of course, that children were not to be punished—when they had done something wrong. But Svanhild took everything so to heart—she was still hiccupping on the sled behind him—poor little thing!

The evening sky rose darkly purple high over the towers and spires on the Terrace. The weather had cleared up. There was left only a thin sooty streak of fog in the street, around the lights, as Simonsen trudged along, pulling his daughter on the sled.

The palace park was such a pretty place. The heavy hoar-frost on the trees and the bushes everywhere sparkled in the reflection from the lamps. And such a mass of children everywhere! On every least little incline they were coasting and

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skiing. The main slide simply swarmed with them. Big naughty boys—sometimes five or six to a sled—hooted and yelled as they sped down over the icy crust, swinging a thin narrow pole, like the tail of a rat, behind them. But Simonsen knew of a quiet little hill, farther in, where he and Svanhild had been in the habit of coasting before in the evenings. And really Svanhild had a grand time. Pappa stood at the top and gave her a good start, and Svanhild yelled “Look out!” so loud that her thin little voice almost cracked, and Simonsen too roared “Look out there!” from way down inside, although apart from themselves there were only two small boys in sport shoes and knitted caps on the whole hill. Simonsen took the initiative and made their acquaintance. They were Alf and Johannes Hauge, and their father was an office manager, and lived in Parkveien. Simonsen started all three of them down; they were to see whose sled was the fastest, but he gave Svanhild the most vigorous push, and she won. And he ran down after them and helped Svanhild up the hill again, for otherwise she would have stuck fast in the snow every time she went through the crust.

But after a while Svanhild began to whimper.
“Pappa, my feet are so cold.”

“Well, then you must run—let’s go up on the road and run around a bit.”

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Svanhild ran and cried—her toes hurt her so.

“Oh ho! You must run much faster, Svanhild—let’s see if you can catch pappa!”

Simonsen minced along with wee tiny steps like a bouncing rubber ball. And Svanhild ran after him as fast as she could, and caught him, till she grew warm again and cheerful and happy.

But by that time they had lost track of their sled. Simonsen looked for it above the hill and below the hill and in between the bushes—it was nowhere to be found. Alf and Johannes had seen it stand over by a large tree in the road some time back, but that was all they knew. And—oh yes—some big naughty boys had gone by—that Simonsen too remembered. It was most likely they who had taken it.

Svanhild was heartbroken and cried—it really hurt one to see her. Simonsen thought of Olga. Ugh, she wouldn’t grow any sweeter, touchy as she was nowadays. What scamps those boys were! To steal a poor little girl’s sled! To think that children could be so mean!

“Don’t cry, Svanhild sweetheart—we’ll find your sled again all right.”

Simonsen went about from hill to hill and inquired after a little blue painted sled. Svanhild trudged along with him and cried, and Alf and Johannes followed them, both holding fast to the rope of their sled, while they told, as their eyes

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bulged, of all they had heard about big naughty boys, who went about stealing sleds, and ran down children, and threw chunks of ice on the slides.

There was no trace of the sled to be found, but up on the main road they met a smartly dressed angry lady, who turned out to be Alf's and Johannes' nurse, and who scolded them for not coming home long ago and promised them they would get theirs from pappa and mamma. She wasn't at all concerned to learn that the little girl was named Svanhild and that she had lost her sled—as she scolded and shuffled away, holding each of the boys in an iron grip. Then Simonsen was almost hit in the eye by a steering pole and in the shins by a sharp sled runner.

“Well, Svanhild, they've apparently made away with your sled—I don't imagine we'll ever see it again,” Simonsen sighed, dejected. “But don't cry so now, little sweetheart. Pappa'll get you a new sled for Christmas. Come, let's go down Carl Johan and look at the shop windows—they're so beautiful to-night—perhaps we'll see a nice new sled for you too—” and he brightened up.

Svanhild and her pappa went down and looked at the shops. And when they came up to a window in front of which the stream of people had stopped and formed one dark stationary milling mass of humanity, Simonsen raised her on his

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arms, and struggled and edged his way through, till they were right in front of the brilliantly lighted window, where they continued to stand as long as there was one single item left to talk about and guess the price of. In some places there were Christmas trees, colorfully arrayed, and lighted with electric bulbs. Svanhild was also to have a Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. In one window there was a regular Christmas party of lady dolls, smartly dressed—as Svanhild would be when she grew up. And in another shop, which dealt in trunks and bags, there was a wee tiny crocodile in a wee tiny water basin. There they had to stand a long time speculating as to whether it was alive. At last it moved one eye just the least bit—just think, it was alive! And this little crocodile, when it grew up, would be so large that it could swallow a whole Svanhild in a single bite.

“But now it can’t bite any, can it?”

“No, now it can’t hurt you.”

Up near Eketorvet there was a cinematograph in a window among moving picture advertisements. Svanhild, who had been to the movies with pappa—three times already—had to remember all they had seen—the two little girls who had been kidnapped by robbers in an automobile, and all the rest. Forgotten was the sled they had lost, and mamma, who sat pursing her lips over

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her sewing, till she grew tired and cross. Forgotten was everything now—except that Svanhild was pappa's little girl, and that Christmas Eve was only seventeen days off.

Then they passed by a sporting goods shop, with many sleds, large and small, on display in the window, and the grandest of them all—the one with the fiery red and the roses painted on it and the bronze gilt iron braces—Svanhild was to get from her pappa for Christmas.

After that they had to have something to warm them up a bit. Simonsen knew of a cozy little temperance café, since it was Sunday, and the wine shop was closed. There were no other people present, and the waitress behind the counter was not insusceptible to Simonsen's flirtatious persiflage, while he had his coffee and sandwich and Svanhild had a piece of cake and a sip now and then of pappa's coffee.

"You needn't tell mamma," Simonsen saw fit to caution her, as he winked one eye. But Svanhild knew better than to tell mamma anything, whenever she and pappa on their evening walks dropped into one place or other, and she had a stick of candy, from which—mamma thought—little girls got a toothache, and pappa had something to drink, from which—mamma thought—he got a bad stomach. But mamma always was so busy, and it made her cross. Pappa too was

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busy when he was at the warehouse, and Henry when he was at the office. When one was grown up one had to work terribly hard, Svanhild had learned.

After Sunday came Monday and five other gray week-days. Svanhild sat on the floor in the sewing room and played by herself, for pappa now came home so late in the evening that he could not take her out walking. Pappa, too, was cross now, Svanhild noticed—whether it was because he had so much to do at the office, or because mamma had so much to do that she scarce had time to prepare dinner or get his supper until late in the evening. And Henry, too, was irritable, for lady customers used the room in which he ordinarily slept, for fitting and trying on till late at night, and kept him from getting to bed as he should. But Svanhild comforted herself with the thought of the new sled she was to get for Christmas.

On the fifteenth Anton Simonsen wrote to his son. He was tired of running around looking for jobs—which he didn't get anyway. And having done so he faced the future blithely again. He had time once more to take Svanhild out walking evenings, and to help her ski in the park, and they talked of the new sled she was to get.

On the eighteenth, just as he was nailing up

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a case of machinery, the warehouse foreman came over and told him he was wanted at the telephone. It was Sigurd, who was in town, and invited him to drop in and have coffee with him at the Café Augustin—couldn't he beg off a couple of hours after dinner—that they might talk things over a bit?

“And how is Mossa—and the kiddies?”

The children were all right, thanks. And Mossa had come in with him—intended to make some purchases for Christmas.

“When I come to think of it, son, it's well-nigh hopeless to expect even an hour off now, busy as we are just before Christmas,” Simonsen explained.

Sigurd himself undertook to see the manager about it.

“Well, in that case, all right—you're very kind! ‘Hello’ to Mossa.”

It was just like her! Of course she wouldn't ask him to have dinner with them—oh no! But—by George!—he'd have beer and even something stronger before he turned up for that bout!

“Do you think that's necessary?” Mrs. Mossa Carling asked her husband, who was in the act of uncorking a bottle of punch.

“It seems to me we ought to have a glass of punch for father anyway.”

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"Well, all right—as you please, dear!" Mrs. Carling thrust out her double chin as far as she could. She was not pretty. Her eyelids grew thicker out towards the temples, so that her small gray eyes seemed to creep in towards the bridge of the nose; her face was full and fresh in color, but her mouth was narrow and small and her lips thin, and her chest, finally, was hollow and undersized, while below she was full and broad.

She was sitting in the center of the plush sofa, directly underneath the electric chandelier, whose three globes lit up the hotel room—the two iron bedsteads, the two mahogany washstands, the two small tables and the wardrobe with the mirror, the two easy chairs in front of the larger table, on which stood an ash tray on a doily in the center of a chenille runner.

There was a hesitant knock on the door, and Simonsen entered cautiously. He shook hands with both of them.

"Good afternoon, Sigurd—glad to see you again, son—good afternoon, good afternoon Mossa—it's nice to see you once again too—and just as young and pretty as ever—"

Mossa rang for the coffee, and poured it, while Sigurd filled the glasses.

Simonsen kept eyeing his daughter-in-law, who sat silent, her mouth tightly drawn, as he talked with Sigurd. Leisurely and with many flourishes

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the conversation drifted over to the main business.

"You don't mind if we smoke, do you Mossa? Here, father—a cigar—?"

"And now this matter you wrote about. I was up at the office to-day and had a talk with your manager. He seems to be of the same opinion as I. The city's not quite the place for you. The work here is too strenuous for a man of your age—he seemed to think so too. And I can't get you anything else either for that matter—"

Simonsen said nothing. But Mossa took up the thread.

"Sigurd is himself in a subordinate position, you will have to remember—to some extent at least. The board is not likely to relish having Sigurd forever asking the firm's connections to take his father into their business. He has already done so three times—and you've messed up everything. I may as well tell you outright that Sigurd had some very serious difficulties after he had got you this last place, which you have just been let out of, as I understand—"

"That I had, I assure you. As I say, you don't quite fit in here. You're too old, too, to be constantly trying new things. And there is therefore only one way in which I can help you. I can get you a position up at the Menstad plant in Öimark—nice, easy work. To be sure, the wages

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aren't much—sixty kroner to begin with, if I'm not mistaken. But, as I say, that place I can get for you."

Simonsen said nothing.

"Well—that is the only way I can help you," Sigurd Carling repeated.

"Well—what do you say—shall I get it for you, father?" he asked after a brief pause.

The father cleared his throat a few times before he spoke.

"Well, it's like this, Sigurd—I don't know whether you've heard about it or not—but the fact is I'm engaged—to the woman I've been lodging with these last six years. So I suppose I'll have to talk it over some with Olga first—see what she thinks. Olga—that's her name," he explained, "Mrs. Olga Martinsen; she is a widow."

There was an uncomfortably long pause. Simonsen played with the tassels on the armchair.

"She is a genuine, thorough, good woman in every way, Olga is—and she has a large thriving sewing establishment here in town. So it's a question whether she'd care to move up into that Godforsaken country up there. And her son has an office job in the city too."

"Is this the woman—" Sigurd spoke very deliberately, "that you are said—from what I have heard—to have had a child with—?"

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"We have a little girl, yes—Svanhild by name. She will be five years next April."

"So!" It was Mossa speaking. "So you have a daughter with the woman you are lodging with—who is such a good, proper woman in every way!"

"Well, so Olga is! Orderly and proper—and industrious and hard working, too. And furthermore kind."

"It is really strange, father," Mrs. Mossa made herself very sweet as she spoke, "that you haven't married this excellent Mrs. Martinsen before. It seems to me you had ample reason to do so long ago."

"Let me tell you, Mossa dear," Simonsen beamed with delight, proud of what he was inventing, "I did not want to see my wife work and struggle so hard, and so I waited in hopes of finding something better. But marry Olga I have promised on my word of honor I would, and that promise I'll stand by, as long as my name's Anton Simonsen!"

"Ah," Mossa became sweeter and sweeter, "but sixty kroner a month is not a great deal to get married on—and support a wife and child. And any great amount of sewing of course Olga can't figure on up in Öimark."

"The worst of course, father, is that you have this child. But I suppose Mrs. Martinsen could

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somehow be made to understand the situation—we might perhaps come to some sort of agreement with her.”

“One thing you’ll have to remember, Sigurd—there’s your little sister, Svanhild. I shouldn’t want her to suffer because she is an illegitimate child. It seems to me, Sigurd, you’re incurring a grave responsibility by interfering in this matter.”

Mossa broke in on him almost before he had finished, and now there was not the slightest suggestion of sweetness in her voice.

“When you speak of responsibility, father—for *your* illegitimate child—you really strike me as very funny. Sigurd offers to get you a position—for the fourth time—in Öimark. Here he is unable to get anything. Why, if you don’t think you can leave the city because of your private affairs, you are quite at liberty to remain. If you can find a position here and get married on it—why, that’s your affair and not ours. But Sigurd can obviously not help you in any other way. Surely he must think first and foremost of his own wife and children.”

Mrs. Mossa had arrayed herself in her silk petticoat and draped herself in her new set of furs, when she mounted the stairs the next morning to Mrs. Martinsen’s establishment in the rear

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apartment in Ruselökveien. She pressed the button underneath Simonsen's soiled card with a determined finger.

The woman who let her in was little, plump and dark. She had pretty blue eyes, set in a faded, sun-starved face.

"Is this Mrs. Martinsen? I am Mrs. Carling. I should like to speak with you."

Olga opened a bit hesitantly the door to the nearest room.

"Won't you come in here? I'm sorry there's no fire in here. But we're sewing in the other rooms."

Mrs. Mossa sailed in and seated herself in the only easy chair in the room. It was a room furnished as rooms for rent usually are. On the white dresser scarf stood, conscientiously arranged, photographs of the former Mrs. Simonsen, of Sigurd and herself—their engagement photographs—and two group pictures of the grandchildren.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Martinsen,"—Olga stood over by the dresser observing her,—“there are one or two things I'd like very much to talk over with you. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks—but I am very busy. What was it Madam wished?"

"Well, I won't keep you very long. Simonsen—my husband's father—is apparently, from what

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we gathered from him yesterday, under certain obligations to you. Now I don't know whether he has fully informed you as to his position?"

"You mean the position in Öimark?—Indeed, he has."

"So! Well, you understand, of course, it's quite a small place. If he should take it, he would temporarily not be in a position to fulfill his obligations to you."

"Thank you!" Olga spoke rapidly and to the point. "But it's not necessary to trouble Madam with these affairs. We have just agreed—Simonsen and I—have decided to get married right away."

"Well, in that case, Mrs. Martinsen, I must call your attention to one thing: Simonsen can expect no support of any kind from my husband—absolutely none. He has a large family himself. And for four people to live on sixty kroner a month. Besides the little girl, which is said to be my father-in-law's, you have another child too?"

"My son will remain here—I have a sister in Trondhjemsveien whom he can stay with. And our plan was to sort of make our home in Fredrikstad. Simonsen would come down Saturdays—and I would run a dressmaking shop in the city."

"I see. Well, that might not seem unreasonable either. But there is this to remember, you

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see—there are more than enough seamstresses in Fredrikstad already. It is questionable, *Miss Martinsen*, whether it would pay you to give up your business here and try to establish a new one there.”

Olga started.

“*Mrs. Martinsen*, I beg your pardon. For that, I see, is how you style yourself. My husband and I, to be sure, have done a bit of investigating. It need not surprise you surely, that we should want to know what sort of person it was he had taken up with.”

Olga sniffed scornfully.

“Well, that’s all the same to me, *Mrs. Simonsen*—*Mrs. Carling*, I mean—pardon me. But the fact is that *Simonsen* doesn’t seem to hold it against me that the man I was to marry deserted me for America and left me to provide for myself and my little baby as best I could. And *Simonsen* has promised me—time and time again he has said to me, ‘Don’t worry, I shall never go back on you, *Olga*!’ And then I don’t see why it isn’t all the same to you, *Mrs. Carling*. We shan’t ever trouble you, or run in on you—and seeing your husband hasn’t cared to keep his father’s name—.”

“My dear *Mrs. Martinsen*,” *Mossa* waved her hand and thrust out her chin. “Not so hysterical—please! I’ve surely never dreamed of interfer-

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ing in your affairs. On the contrary, I came here with the best of intentions. I merely wanted to enlighten you—in case you ever imagined Simonsen would be a good provider. I must confess, I don't think you'll attain anything, if you marry him, except the privilege of supporting him as well as the child. If you recall, my dear father-in-law has really never been what you might call an up-and-coming man. We have no guarantee that he will not be as shiftless in the future as he has been in the past. So there you are! Do you think it will be easy for a man of his age—with a family—always to be getting new positions?

"I am here in all friendliness to make you an offer on behalf of my husband. Why, my dear woman, hitherto you have managed to get along without being married. Now, my husband would offer you something—we had thought of five hundred kroner—to cover any loss you might suffer by reason of your lodger leaving you thus suddenly. It's without any conditions, you understand. If my father-in-law should subsequently attain a position that would enable him to marry, we'd have no desire or occasion to interfere. As you quite rightly said, that is none of our business. And as regards your little girl, my husband and I have talked the matter over and would offer her a home with us."

"Never—as long as I live!" Olga flashed.

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"Part with Svanhild! That you may rest assured I'll never, never consent to."

"All right—as you please, of course. And you and my father-in-law will, of course, suit yourselves, if you want to marry on sixty kroner a month—give up your livelihood here, and undertake to start anew in Fredrikstad, which I can promise you will be very difficult. It is so perfectly incomprehensible to me what you want with Simonsen anyway. Heavens, to marry—you already call yourself 'Mrs.' In your circle people aren't so particular about some little affair you may have had with one of your lodgers. That you ever took up with Simonsen—really you must excuse me for saying it—in my opinion it doesn't speak very well for you. In plain language he's really nothing but an old swine!"

Olga interrupted her.

"You might just as well stop right here, Mrs. Carling. But I'll tell you, in plain language, what it was I wanted with Anton Simonsen. One thing and another there may be about him that one might object to. But I noticed one thing very soon, whatever else one might say, he had a kind heart. And there are not too many kind people around, let me tell you! And no sooner did he realize that I took pains and wanted to make him comfortable than he began to feel at home, and straightened up and became regular in his habits,

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as he might have done sooner, in my opinion, had he been made comfortable before. No, you can't deny—Anton's kind-hearted and grateful. And then his fondness for Svanhild—really he goes too far in his love for the child—he is downright spoiling her. I am fond of Simonsen, let me tell you, Mrs. Carling."

Mossa rose and thrust her gloved finger tips in between the lace frills of her muff.

"Of course—if you're in *love* with Simonsen—that's another matter."

She sailed out.

That Mr. Sigurd Carling had a high opinion of his wife's sagacity is true enough. He had so often heard others say—that he had come to believe it himself—that it was Miss Mossa Myhre who had put life into Sigurd Carl Simonsen when he was a mere clerk and had made him the man he was. But he had nevertheless had his doubts as to whether she was the proper person to come to an understanding with Mrs. Martinsen. For there was no denying that she looked at things quite rigorously, and this Olga, it appeared, had had two children a bit irregularly. Mossa could on occasion be rather sharp and disagreeable. He was sorry therefore afterwards—he had been foolish to let her go. For some kind of understanding had to be arrived at. Should the father

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come down to Fredrikstad and live, with a wife and child whom he could not provide for—it was as clear as day what the end would be. Never would he feel secure against unexpected, unforeseen demands for assistance—and then all the other aggravations which always trailed his father. And everlasting difficulties with Mossa.

The affair had to be settled—and that immediately, before the old fellow had time to slip one over on them first. He had been up at the Hercules Machine Shops and had ordered the two new turbines, and had had at the same time a few words *en passant* relative to his father. Simonsen—it was now arranged—was to leave Christmas Eve, in order that he might go home with them and spend Christmas with his family.

Later he started off himself to see Mrs. Martinsen.

Olga's eyes were red from much weeping when Simonsen came home to dinner. Carling had been there. He had been very nice for that matter, she said. He had asked to see Svanhild, and he had set her on his knee, and had promised her something for Christmas. Later he had talked with Olga. It was this miserable debt of hers—she was behind in her rent, and had bills at various shops here and there—so she had accepted the money. He had promised her fifteen kroner a month for Svanhild—that was some-

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thing sure anyway—and she had to consider Henry too—he wouldn't be able to take care of himself entirely for some time yet. Fifteen kroner a month, he had said, for the time being—"until my father becomes self-supporting and can marry you." Olga was sitting on Simonsen's knee, in his cold room, in the easy chair in front of the dresser with the family portraits, and she wept, and he caressed and comforted her.

"Really, Anton, I don't know—! What else was there I could do? If he won't help you—why, there's no other way out. And I understood from the way he talked—he won't help in any other way. If they are so set against us, I don't suppose we could make a go of it in Fredrikstad either, you see—"

She blew her nose and dried away her tears, and then started in to cry again.

"One must take what comes—must stand a lot when one is poor."

But persuade Simonsen to go down and spend Christmas with them—that Sigurd and Mossa were unable to do. They held out the prospect of a Christmas tree and the grandchildren and goose and ale and wine and head-cheese all through the Christmas holidays. But the old man was firm—he wanted to spend Christmas with Olga and the children. All they could get him to promise was that he would run down the

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day after Christmas. For Sigurd had given him twenty-five kroner by way of a Christmas gift. It was best therefore to get him away from the city, lest he go gadding about during the holidays with money in his pockets and nothing to do. It was preferable after all that the old fellow did his Christmas drinking with them—under supervision.

The day before Christmas Eve, when Simonsen came home, he had the sled under one arm. And he hummed in a deep bass as he lit the lamp in his room and undid his packages.

There was something in the way of drinks for the holidays—aquavit and punch and port for Olga. With a little ale now he'd be all set. A pipe for Henry. It didn't cost a great deal—it was mostly to show the lad he hadn't forgotten him—and a manly thing to get too it was for that matter. Otherwise he had been almost niggardly. The waist material for Olga cost only one forty-five, but he had bought her a brooch too for three seventy-five—and really it looked like something worth upwards of ten kroner. Simonsen took it out of the box—ah, wouldn't she be delighted! And for Miss Abrahamsen, too, he would get something—by way of remembrance. Some trifling thing—he could easily afford it.

And then the sled! Simonsen, after removing

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the table cloth from the table, unwrapped it and placed it on exhibition.

"Oh, Olga dear, can you come here for a second?" he called out into the sewing room.

"Well, what is it? I'm very busy—"

Simonsen moved the lamp over to the table.

"And what do you suppose Svanhild'll say to that, Olga?"

"But the veneer, Anton!" And Olga placed newspapers underneath the sled and lamp. "Yes—a beautiful—lovely—sled—."

"And see here," and Simonsen unbuckled the cushion and showed her the painted roses. "The cushion was extra, of course, you understand."

"Hm! It cost quite a bit, I imagine?"

"Five kroner and twenty-five öre—with the cushion," Simonsen proclaimed proudly.

"So! That seems a lot of money to put into a thing like that, Anton. She's still so young—she might have been satisfied, even if it had not been quite so grand." And Olga sighed.

"Oh, well, seeing we have a few pennies to spend, we might as well do it. It's only fun, it seems to me, to give a little liberally. And now that you'll be rid of your debt—. I've not forgotten my sweetheart either, you'll see," and he nudged her playfully. "Can you get me a couple of glasses, Olga? I've bought some port—we'll

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see how you like it—it was mostly for your sake, you see, that I bought it.”

Olga glanced at the row of bottles on the dresser. She sighed again. Then she brought in the glasses.

It was late Christmas Eve before Mrs. Martinsen had finished her work. But finally everything was in order. Henry had delivered the last of the dresses as soon as they were done, and Olga and Miss Abrahamsen had straightened up and gathered everything in bundles on the chairs and the table in the sewing room. Miss Abrahamsen had had her coffee and cake, and had received a bottle of eau de cologne from Simonsen before she left.

After that Olga went into the living room. She cleared the table of the fashion journals and the chairs of dress goods and materials for lining, and gathered up the buttons and pins on the console in glass trays. Then she lit the Christmas tree, which she had trimmed the evening before.

Svanhild and Henry and Simonsen came in. The elders sat down in the plush chairs. But Svanhild danced about and was happy, greatly captivated by all the lights,—caught sight of the sled—and shouted for joy,—ran back to the tree and scarcely knew what to do with herself for joy. Simonsen beamed, and Olga smiled, although her eyes were annoyingly red. Simonsen

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had noticed them several times during the afternoon. Ugh, it would be just his luck to have her start crying to-night,—when he so wanted them all to be happy.

He brought in his gifts, and he smiled mischievously; no doubt she thought the waist material a meager gift. Then he brought out a bottle of eau de cologne,—he had given in to his desire to be extravagant when he was in the fifty öre shop getting something for Miss Abrahamsen. And there was even a sewing basket for Olga, and a little match box, which looked like silver, for Henry. The boy thanked him as a matter of course, and laid the pipe and the box in the window, where he sprawled lazily in a chair.

Then finally the brooch!

“These other things, you see, are kind of practical,—I wanted you to have something else too, Olga—.”

Olga opened the box, and tears came into her eyes.

“But so many things, Anton!”

Simonsen gave a grand flourish of the hand.

“I hope you’ll keep me in mind when you wear it, Olga, dear.”

“I certainly shall, Anton!”

“And, say,—what about the box that came this evening for Svanhild?”

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Olga brought it in.

It was addressed "Little Miss Svanhild, care of Mrs. Martinsen's Dressmaking Establishment." Olga opened it. On a card inside was written "A Merry Christmas." It was from Sigurd Carling, and it was a doll,—but oh, what a doll!

It had yellow curly hair and eyes that opened and closed, and it was dressed in a white coat with a white fur cap and muff, and there was a tiny pair of skates hung over one arm—that was the grandest of all. Svanhild was struck speechless—but Simonsen prated. He and Svanhild were equally delighted with the doll.

"Well, I suppose mamma had better put this away for you—it wouldn't do, you see, to play with it except on Sundays—."

"After all, Sigurd is kind," he said to Olga, who came in with the glasses and a pitcher of hot water. "That's what I've always said—Sigurd is really kind at heart—it's that confounded wife of his that winds him round her finger, for he is really kind—."

Simonsen brewed himself a hot toddy, and Olga had some port. Svanhild, too, was given a little port in a glass by herself as she sat on pappa's knee.

"Won't you come over here too, Henry, and

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brew yourself a toddy—you're 'most a grown man now, you know."

Henry rose somewhat reluctantly. He avoided looking at Simonsen. He had a pale freckled face and hard light-colored eyes. He looked thin and slight in the man-sized clothes he wore.

"Well, skaal then, all three!—This is what I call having a cozy time! Aren't we having a cozy time, Olga?"

"Yes, indeed!" She sat biting her lips, for the tears came into her eyes. "If only one could know where we'd be next Christmas—!"

Simonsen lit his cigar. He seemed a bit annoyed.

"Don't you want to try your pipe, Henry? There's some tobacco on my dresser—if you don't happen to have any yourself."

"No thanks!" was Henry's only reply.

"Ah yes—next Christmas—." Olga sighed and struggled to keep from crying.

"It's not easy to know what one doesn't know," Simonsen remarked, and leaned back in the sofa. "This certainly was a good cigar! Well, skaal, Olga! Who knows—perhaps we'll all be celebrating next Christmas with the peasants in the country! They celebrate Christmas royally up in Öimark, I am told. I really think you'd like living in the country, Olga,—I really do. It wouldn't be so bad,—all you'd have to do would

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be to step outside and chop down your own Christmas tree. How would you like that, Svanhild,—go with pappa into the woods and get a Christmas tree, and haul it home on your sled?"

Svanhild beamed ecstatically.

"And Henry'd have to beg off a few days at the office and come and celebrate Christmas with us."

Henry smiled—a bit scornfully.

"Wouldn't that be fun, Svanhild,—go down to the station and meet Henry at the train? How would you like living with pappa and mamma on a big gaard in the country—with cows and horses and pigs and chicken and everything? And nice Sigurd, who gave you your doll,—he has a little girl about your age too, and a boy a bit larger, and a wee tiny baby,—you could go down and play with them in the city."

"And I'd go down and drink tea with that swell daughter-in-law of yours,—if that's what you mean, Anton!"

"I don't see why *that* should follow."

"How you can sit and talk such nonsense!" Olga laughed, and then began to cry.

"But, Olga, what are you crying for now, my girl? Why must you always take it that way—?"

"Well, how do you want me to take it? I ought to be grateful to boot, I suppose—that this swell daughter-in-law of yours flung in my face

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that Henry's father once deserted me, and that now you're leaving me. And we'll be left here with our shame—my children and I—my unfathered children! You think, as they do, I suppose, I am only fit to slave away forever, sewing for these fancy females you carry on with so scandalously. But I 'spose it's natural that all you people think you can treat me just as you please! Well, that's what I get,—I should have known what sort you men were,—when you've had what you want from a poor woman,—why off you go and leave her sitting with the bag."

"But Olga!"

"Ah, it's easy enough for you. I should say so! All you need do is to move up into the country,—and then take to drink and women again and all the rest, and run around wallowing in mire, as you were when I first took hold of you—. Oh God, how simple and foolish I was to believe you and let you do with me as you pleased!"

"But Olga, for heaven's sake, think of the children!"

"Oh, don't worry,—they hear it, you may rest assured,—in the yard and on the stairs. They might just as well hear it from me too."

"But—it's Christmas Eve to-night,—surely you ought to remember that," Simonsen protested paternally.

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Olga wept quietly, her head on the table. Simonsen placed his hand over on her shoulder.

"But, Olga,—surely you know—you know very well that I am fond of you. And Svanhild? Do you think perhaps I shall ever forget my little innocent child? On that score you may rest assured, Olga. I shan't ever betray you or leave you,—what I've promised I'll keep!"

"The poor thing!" Olga sat up and blew her nose. "It won't be you, I'm afraid, who'll say as to that, Anton."

"One thing there is, Olga, you must remember," he put one arm about her neck and held Svanhild with the other, and he straightened up and thrust his stomach out, "there's one greater than either Sigurd or Mossa who presides over that—and over all of us."

"But isn't it time to sing some Christmas songs?" he asked after a bit. He took a sip of his toddy and cleared his throat. "'Oh, blessed aye is Christmas Eve'—shall we sing that? Svanhild knows that, I'm sure. All right, Svanhild, sweetheart."

Svanhild sang whole-heartedly, and Simonsen hobbled along, falling by the wayside at the high notes, but always starting afresh at the beginning of each verse. After a little Olga too joined them with her tear-broken voice. Only Henry did not sing.

Sigrid Undset

And after Olga had gone out to tend to the cream pudding and the spare ribs, Simonsen and Svanhild still went on singing.

And then finally the last morning came. The alarm clock in Olga's room sounded, but Simonsen merely rolled over, half-dozing in the dark,—it was so cold to get up. Everything was gray and gloomy. Especially the prospect of having to get up and go out in the cold—away from everything.

Such a bed—with feather ticks on top and underneath—he had never experienced in any of the many places he had lived in before.

Olga opened the door, and in the light from her own room she set down the tray she was carrying, lit the lamp, and moved the tray over on the bed. There was coffee and cake.

"You'll have to hurry, I guess, Anton."

"I suppose so."

Simonsen sighed. He drew her over to him and patted her, in the intervals of dipping his cakes and drinking his coffee.

"Ah, what excellent coffee you have to-day, Olga dear,—can't you sit down and have some with me?"

"I'm afraid I must get busy and start breakfast—."

Simonsen crawled out of bed and got his

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clothes on. He thrust the last few items into his hand-bag and locked both bags. Then he went into Olga's room.

He crossed over to the bed where Svanhild lay sleeping. He stood there for some time, his hands in his pockets, looking at her. Dear little Svanhild!

He peered into the living room too. It was pitch dark and icy cold. Henry had gone off to Nordmarken early Christmas morning with some friends of his. He fussed about in there awhile,—came up against Svanhild's Christmas tree in the dark and set the tinsel trimmings tinkling. Ah,—he sighed,—when—if ever—would he see the place again!

And he returned to Olga's room. It was warm and comfortable. The lower end of the table had been cleared, where Olga and Miss Abrahamson sat all day sewing; a white table cloth had been laid, and breakfast all ready,—head-cheese and ale and dram and everything,—and the lamp glowed peacefully and hummed softly as it burned. A bit of light fell upon Svanhild, asleep in her little bed, her pretty hair down over her forehead. His poor little girl!

There was a warmth and coziness in the room. Ah, how comfortable he had been here—with her—Olga—and Svanhild. His eyes filled with tears,—he let the tears run—did not wipe them

Sigrid Undset

away—in order that Olga might see them. His flabby blue-red cheeks were quite wet when Olga came in with the coffee.

"Well, we'd better eat," she said.

"Yes, we may as well. And Svanhild—? Don't you think she might have liked to go to the train with us—have a ride in the sleigh?"

"I had thought of it, Anton, but it's so dark and cold outside—. Perhaps I'd better wake her anyway,—she can have a drop of coffee with us."

She went over to the bed—shook the child gently.

"Svanhild, don't you want to get up and have coffee with pappa and mamma?"

Svanhild blinked her eyes as she sat in her night dress on Simonsen's knee. The coffee wakened her a bit, but she was quite still and spiritless,—since the grown ups were so quiet—.

"Where are you going, pappa?"

"To Fredrikstad, of course."

"But when are you coming back?"

"Oh, I imagine you'll be coming down to me first."

"In the country—you told about?"

"Why, yes—."

"There you can go sliding with me again, pappa,—can't you?"

"There we can go sliding,—I should say so!"

The door bell rang. Olga looked out. The

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sleigh had arrived. The carrier's boy came and took Simonsen's bags down.

Simonsen kissed Svanhild and got up, and stood a moment with her in his arms.

"And now, Svanhild, you must be a nice good little girl,—while pappa is away."

"I'll be good," Svanhild answered.

Olga went out into the kitchen and turned off the gas—since Svanhild was to be home alone—and came in again, and stood ready, her finger on the wick of the lamp.

"Well, Anton—."

He gave Svanhild a resounding kiss, put her in her bed, and covered her up.

"Well, good-by, Svanhild dear!"

Olga put out the light, and they went out. In the hall he put his arms about her and pressed her close to him, and they kissed each other.

They sat silent in the sleigh as they shuffled down the streets in the dark morning. Nor had they anything to say to each other as they strolled about in the cold uninviting station hall. But she was ever at his heels,—when he bought his ticket, when he checked his baggage,—stood right behind him, small and dressed in black and looking short and square in her wraps.

They made their way leisurely into the waiting room and sat looking up at the station clock.

Sigrid Undset

"We got here early enough surely," Olga remarked.

"We did that,—and that's always best when one is travelling. It was a shame, Olga, that you had to get up so early—now in the holidays."

"Oh—!" Olga replied. "But perhaps we'd better go out and make sure of a seat on the train."

Simonsen got himself and his belongings stowed away in a smoking coupé. And he stood at the window and Olga below on the station platform.

"Well, take care of yourself, Olga,—and write often—how you're getting on—."

"And you do the same, Anton."

They began to close the doors down the line. Olga stepped up on the runboard, and they kissed each other again.

"Well, Olga, you've been mighty good to me."

"No more than you to me, Anton. And have a good trip!"

The locomotive whistled—a jerk ran down the length of the train—and it began to move forward. Olga and Simonsen got out their handkerchiefs, and waved to each other, as long as they could see anything.

The train thundered away at the first gray sign of dawn—past the homes at Bækkelaget—at Norstrand—at Ljan. Some of the windows were

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already lit up. The icy gray of the fjord was just visible, on the lower side of the track, with islands scattered about.

Ugh, uncomfortable! Simonsen was alone in the coupé, sucked his cigar, and looked out the window. Gaards and forests swept by—swam by—grayish brown fields with strips of snow in the furrows—black woods—.

Well,—Olga was probably home by now. He wondered what she might be doing. Dressing Svanhild perhaps. She intended to sew to-day,—she had said. So Svanhild would have to sit on the floor over by the window and play with her doll rags. There was no pappa now to take her out coasting in the park.

Ah, that cozy room with the two warm beds in,—and the lamp, and the sewing all spread out, and the bits of rag on the floor, which one was forever wading around in,—and Svanhild over by the window,—ah, his blessed little child!

He could see her sitting quiet all by herself. Now and then a Miss Hellum or some other Miss went over and offered her some candy. Svanhild would surely miss her pappa a lot!

It was not as it should be—not as it should be!

For a moment he was about to explode with-in,—because it was not as it should be. His heart—what life had left him of it—fairly burned within him.

Sigrid Undset

"Svanilla,—Svanilla dear," he muttered to himself.

But he pushed the thoughts aside.

The little innocent child,—so good—so good,—would she not fare all right!

He wiped away his tears. There was, after all, some one mightier than they who ruled such things. Yes,—one had to console oneself with the thought that there was after all a higher destiny that ruled everything.

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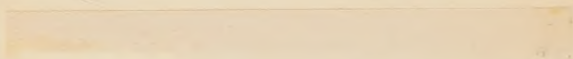
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